

# **The Ladakhi**

**A Study in Ethnography and Change**

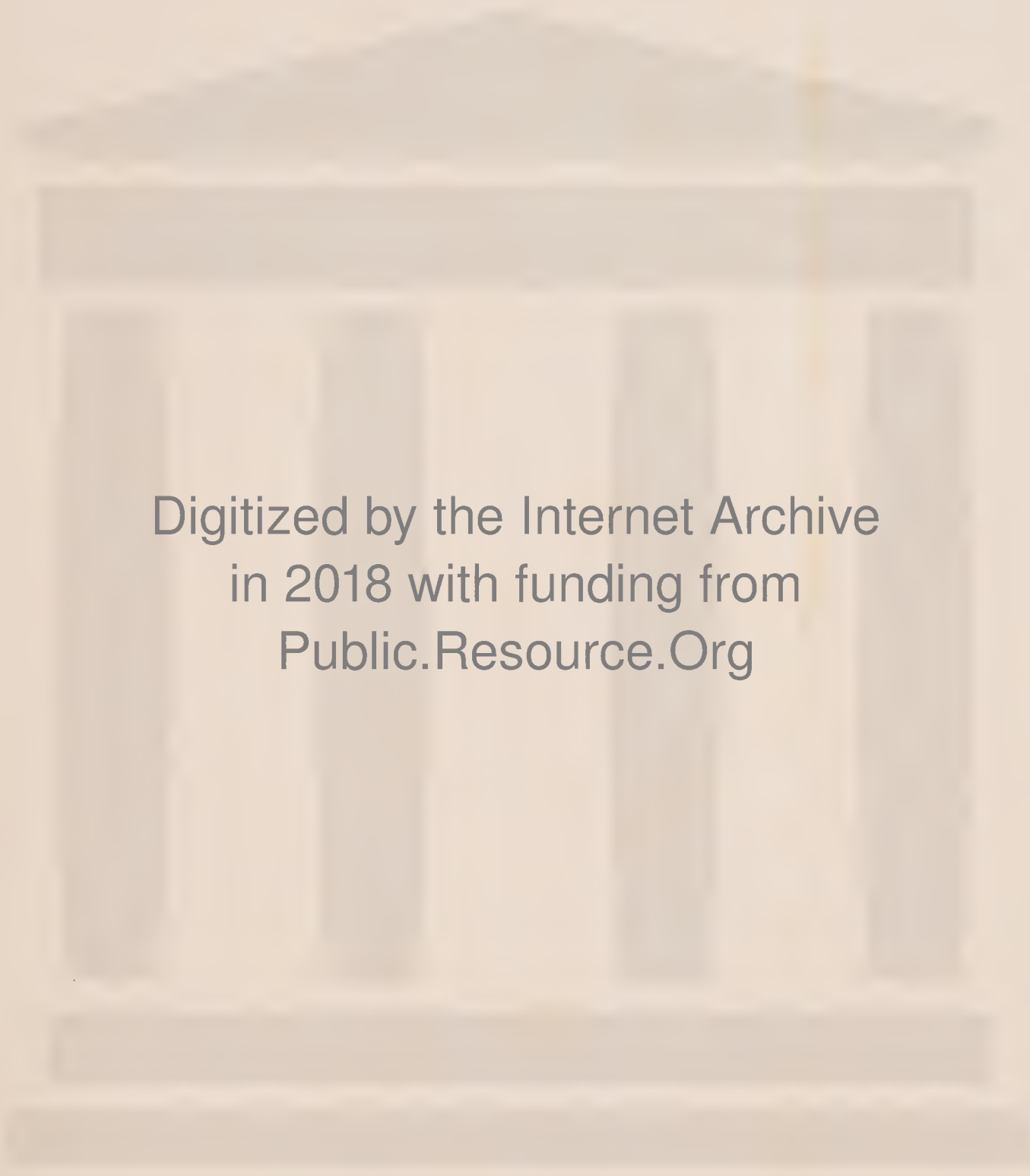
**R. S. Mann**

## About the book

This study explores and explains various aspects of life and culture of the Ladakhis. While explaining and interpreting diverse parameters of Ladakhi cultural matrix, the focus remains on continuity and change perspective. Ethnographic features do speak of elements of persistence, as also of nature and extent of change. The patterns of Ladakhi society and culture, therefore, are analysed not only in static forms but also within the fold of dynamics.

Within the traditions of holistic approach, the elements of Ladakhi social organisation have specially been analysed in the context of ecology and religion, the two imposing and dominant domains characterizing the remote habitations of the Ladakhis. Monastic organisation and typical kind of ecology have had a great say in shaping the Ladakhi society and culture.

In Ladakhi society, more of the dimensions of cultural change chiefly seek their origin to exogenous factors. The latter are actively involved in changing the physical conditions and the destiny of humans in Ladakh.



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R. S. MANN

*Assisted by* T. K. GHOSH



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## PREFACE

Culture change and its dynamics have, of late, formed an important arena in the social anthropological and sociological frameworks. At theoretical level the rise of acculturation phenomenon, and at the level of social-cultural reality the massive planning for transformation of societies, attracted the attention of social-cultural researchers and analysts. Their intervention, as social analysts, was specially desired and demanded by the societies of Third World countries who suddenly fell in the imposing sway of change. The strategy of change of these developing nations further asked for analytical observations and interpretations of social researchers, which could be taken advantage of in regulating transition and ultimately a smooth transformation. India, being the major developing nation of South Asia, provided a large scope for studies on description of culture and its changing perspective. Her plural society, and large scale social-cultural heterogeneity needed more comprehensive and intensive social research, specially in the context of change. Purposed search for important relevant parameters was, thus, desired for human populations, including those occupying interior, outlying and isolated localities. As part of this trend it was thought to cover upper Himalayas. For various reasons the life and culture of the people, belonging to this formation, continued to remain unexplored. These little known communities were considered all the more important in terms of their cultural heritage and change. The present work on Ladakhi life and culture, and the changes thereof, is an outcome of the background outlined above.

It may be mentioned that no reasonably good account of Ladakhi life and culture is available in the existing literature. To my knowledge, no anthropologist or sociologist has, so far, made any deep study on Ladakhi life-designs. Except a few articles, here and there, no book, exclusively devoting to scientific explanation of Ladakhi way of life, could be published. People continue to quote century old works of some British administrators and army officers. My description of Ladakhi society is a modest attempt within the tradition of scientific procedure. I do not claim it a very exhaustive, ethnographic and change account. But certainly the book provides deep insight into the social structure and organisation of Ladakhis. The focus has been on fixity and persistence of social system on the one hand, and change on the other. Continuity and change are highlighted in individual chapters, as also in the finale given towards the close of book. The readers, I presume, would be able to well locate the nature, degree and trends of change. In addition to exogenous factors of change, the format of endogenous stimulants and barriers to change are well delineated at relevant places.

A large number of cultural elements and events of Ladakhis have an intimate bearing to eco-system. Their explanations are best sought in ecological parameters. People seem to have made an excellent adjustment



and adaptation to imposing external conditions. This is reflected in their nature of behaviour and interaction among themselves, as also in their equation with nature. People feel that their adaptation alone made them survive whenever nature posed threat to their existence. Details of rites, rituals ceremonies, institutions and social groupings provide support to their arguments.

Religion continues to form their richest resource for seeking satisfaction and inspiration. Its elaborate form intervenes at all levels and in all walks of life. The faith of Ladakhis in religious attributes remains unaltered. The villagers find no alternative to religious explanations which are stated to have helped them althrough. Occasionally the monastic organisations (the repository of religion) seem to come hard on the villagers, but the same is taken as normal part of living. Religious hierarchy and its manifestations are all pervading, interacting so deeply in social economic life, as also in the arena of social control. To one who has thoroughly explored and understood Ladakhi life and culture, it sounds convincing that society (its culture), religion and external ecology provide mutually intervening network forming patterns of society and culture in this remote locality of Indian sub-continent. And this is how people boast of their survival in these lifeless heights.

Buddhism, the religion of Ladakhis, prescribes for egalitarian order. And ideally the religious men provide support to the same. But pragmatically there is lot of contradiction in it. Egalitarianism is more of a slogan than reality. Gara, Mon and some Beda, who are also Buddhists, are differentiated from Ladakhis. They are denied of certain rights and privileges and are socially low. Stratification, inequality and ranking characterize Ladakhi village community. Certain elements of stratification bear resemblance to those of the Hindu caste system. There are other characters which remain short of its requirements. Implications and manifestations of social stratification are well reflected in many aspects of village community and its functioning. Even the monastic organisation, in its practical perspective, does cultivate some deprivation and alienation in respect of people belonging to certain ethnic groups, even when they are Buddhists. On the other hand the rest get concession and are privileged.

A sharp rise of new economic opportunities has considerably helped meet Ladakhi's growing aspirations and expectations. Fast growth of employment potential, adoption of some agriculture innovations and expansion of internal trade have opened up new avenues of earning. Involvement in such ventures did reflect on the ongoing pattern of division of labour. It has its repercussions even in the social and religious life.

The abrupt growth of a strong network of communication helped widen mechanism of socio-political control. It applied to structure as well as function perspectives. The growth of linkages with wider political agencies and parties added new dimensions to Ladakhi politics and social control. Religion and politics came closer. The formal system of electioneering paved way to divisive tendency. Alien influence on local ways



led to readjustment in certain social groupings. But the new avenues have not undermined the role of religion in resolving conflict and in bringing about consensus. To take care of new political ends the religion is rather being strengthened. Dependence on traditional bodies of social control is still the supreme, and so the devotion of people to the same.

For paucity of existing relevant material, the explanations and descriptions remain largely field-based. This document is an outcome of over six months of field-work in Ladakh in 1970-71. Since the study focused on continuity and change, four villages (Spituk, Sabu, Thiksay and Kuyul) were intensively researched. From Leh, the headquarters of Ladakh district and the only urban centres, these villages are located at different distances—from nine to two hundred fifty kilometers. These settlements are at various altitudes, ranging from 9,500 to 14,000 feet above sea level. Three hundred families provided major platform for statistical and other treatment. Descriptive data, however, were also collected from other informants belonging to these and other neighbouring villages, as also from other population groups. With a total population of 1806, these three hundred families have 885 males and 921 females. With average family size of 6.02, the male-female proportion is 100:104. The higher proportion of females does not outwardly go in tune with polyandrous system which these Ladakhis have. Another interesting feature pertains to literacy rate and the position of woman. Total educated and literates form 18.27% (male 14.01% and female 4.26%). In view of large amount of freedom enjoyed by the Ladakhi women, their literacy is far short of the men. The point of literacy was specially stressed upon because it is presumed to have a bearing on social-cultural change.

The author takes full responsibility of any shortcoming in the monograph. At some places the explanations may not meet all the expectations of the readers because the author worked under terrible constraints of hostile climatic conditions, remoteness and linguistic communication. The author is grateful to Shri T. K. Ghosh who assisted in the filling of some family schedules.



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## Ecological and Historical Perspective

Ladakh has been referred by many names, usually differing in terms of language and association of the place with the ecology around. A common Tibetan name of Ladakh is La-tags, though it is also termed as Maryul or low-land or red-land and Kha-chan-pa or snow-land. This region has also been mentioned as Kia-chha and Ma-lo-pho by Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang respectively. Some have referred it as the land of monks and monasteries. It has also been described as an area where people grow Lamas (monks), yaks, monasteries and devil dancers. According to Ganpat (1916) some Muslims termed Ladakh as Kufristan which means "the land of the Pagan", people of evil customs also because they drink wine and one woman marries many men.

Ladakh is the most north-western part of India and forms a district of Jammu and Kashmir State. The Lahaul and Spiti districts are touching its southern boundaries. Ladakh district is divided into three Tehsils namely Leh, Kargil and Zaskar (Padam). Lately, however, Kargil has been carved out as a separate district. The chief valleys are Leh, Chushul, Rupshu and Changchenme. Extending from south-east to north-west, through the greater part of Ladakh, is the principal valley following the course of the Indus. The valleys are not very wide. The cultivated fields spread out in the depths of the valleys. There are some streams of lesser extent and size flowing to Indus. The Indus taking off at Mansarover, and entering Ladakh near Demchock, flows diagonally towards the north-west. Principal tributaries of Indus are Zaskar, Dras, Shyok and Shigar. Shyok and its tributary Nubra are fed by the glaciers in the Karakoram range. Dras is a mighty and imposing river. The greyish-blue water of Indus rolls while rushing and roaring.

The chief ranges in Ladakh are Zaskar, Karakoram and Ladakh. These, running from north-west or west to south-east or east, divide the area laterally into various regions. Ladakh range is north of Leh, the headquarter of the district. The important passes in this range are Chang-La and Khardung-La. The beautiful valleys of Nubra and Shyok are towards the north of the range. Towards the north and west of Shyok river is the Karakoram range. Indo-Sinkiang trade route has been through the famous depression of Karakoram pass. Godwin Austen peak (28,265 ft.) is the culmination of the flanking masses of Karakoram. It is said that Karakoram is one range in the world having the largest



number of giant peaks. To the south of Ladakh range lies the Zaskar range separated by the river Indus. Ladakh, the India's largest district and the northern-most part of the Himalayas has the natural boundaries of Karakoram and Zaskar. The east of Ladakh is bounded by comparatively low hills, most unlike a typical mountainous region. But the character and nature of terrain change towards west where the valleys deepen and mountain elevation remains higher. They form, like the Himalayas, massive ridges where spurs fall steeply into the deep valleys.

Except a few fertile tracts along the river banks, the rest of the area has a barren and desolated look. In most of the places and for miles together nothing appears to break the barrenness of the landscape under the towering hills. In the thickness of naked and bleak mountains, one comes across a few snow-capped peaks. Ladakh forms one of the most elevated areas of the world and there are reported human habitations ranging from 9,000 to about 15,000 feet above sea level. In the remote district of Ladakh, there are stony hill roads or bridle paths. Leh-Srinagar and some other metalled roads have lately been constructed. The big boulders, terribly steep ascents and dangerous descents make journey difficult. The snow on the lofty peaks and snow avalanches on the high passes also pose difficulty. The journey is very monotonous with gazing at rocks loosened stones and barren hills. The difficult conditions including frowning weather and freezing cold have fatal consequences. One can occasionally see patches of snow and glaciated slopes. In Buddhist Ladakh the rocky points and projections are owned by the monasteries which dominate the valleys and villages below them. There are picturesque Chhorten monuments and Manes and these, with the monasteries, provide silent and abandoned looks. There are bare mountains and rocky soil. The plain areas are generally sandy.

Major Singh's description of Ladakh, in a nutshell is worth mentioning. "Ladakh—a land of harsh contradictions where the sub-arctic temperatures of the night give way to the blistering heat of the midnoon sun, the alternating, tangled maze of mountains and the sudden waterless wastes of sand, dead with an eerie aura of lifelessness that perhaps exists nowhere else, deep gorges of purple and magenta rock several thousand feet deep so that they hide the very horizon and hold nothing but the rushing waters of the Indus, narrow-ribbons of pony-tracks, rough bridges of poplar trunks which induce vertige instantly and then, charismatically, an oasis, the mere size of a giant's palm, bubbling with industry, the clucking of hens, the nawing of Zhoos, stoned Kraal of bleating sheep and goats. But above all the smiling human faces (1969:13)". Bhanja (1948) while stressing on the physical features of Ladakh has stated that blades of grass are few and far between. The vast empty spaces, the brown barren hills, the tracts of loose and crumbling sand, the cloudless skies, the penetrating light, the wide extremes of temperature, the scanty rainfall, the dry air, the fierce winds, the low



thorny monotonous vegetation ; these are some of the most impressive features in this cold and elevated tract.

The forbidding climate, remoteness and inaccessibility kept Ladakh isolated, except for traders, for centuries. Lately, however, there is a vast communication with Ladakh, even when it has been declared as a prohibited area. Except when Jojila is blocked with snow, the rest of the year is marked with regular traffic to and from Ladakh. In normal weather, the regular air services are maintained between Chandigarh and Leh, Pathankot and Leh, Srinagar and Leh. The area has been widely thrown open and connected to outside places, specially after 1960. Since Ladakh became a district of Jammu and Kashmir State after 1947, lot of efforts have been made to develop the area. But still certain difficulties are posed because of the district's vast area—occupying about 70.4% of the total area of the Jammu and Kashmir State, towards the east of Kashmir valley. According to 1961 Census, the area in India's possession is 47,200 square miles. The district is very thinly populated. The density of population is two persons per square mile—0.5 per square mile in Leh and 3.0 per square mile in Kargil.

In Ladakh there has, since many centuries, been marked instance of linguistic, ethnic and religious integration and tolerance. There has been simultaneous existence of Baltis, Ladkhis (Bhoto), Tibetans, Dards, Kashmiris, Argons and some others from the different states of plain India. Likewise, the languages reported in Ladakh include Ladakhi, Tibetan, Balti, Dardi, Gilgiti, Brokpa, Kashmiri, Hindi and lately introduced English. Likewise, various religions have simultaneously been existing in Ladakh for centuries. Some blending of religious traits is also marked. There are now people belonging to Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian and Sikh faiths. Certain traits representing linguistic, cultural and religious fusion among various ethnic groups are also observed.

Ladakh has been on the Central Asian trade route (nearly four hundred miles long) and, thus, remained open to traders for centuries. It was the route used when the fourth Buddhist council was held in Kashmir in the time of Kanishka (125-152 A.D.). Hiuen Tsang also made use of this route. Central Asian Trade route has been over Jojila to Leh and then on to Central Asian countries, either via Baltistan or Yarkand. Leh onwards, there has also been a route to Tibet. Jojila, the lowest of all the Himalayan passes, has been mostly used for crossing over to Ladakh. Only the famous army commander, Zorawar Singh, adopted a different route. He brought his troops through Kishtwar and via the 17,370 ft. high Umasila connecting Kishtwar with Zaskar subdivision of Ladakh. This happened for political reasons. Actually Kashmir was, at that time, an independent State and Zorawar Singh, from Jammu, could not make use of it to go via Jojila. There is now a big network of roads to connect places within the district.

The vast arid tracts make the climate hot in summer. The icy winds in winter make it very cold. The winter is long and severe. It starts to-



wards the later half of October and continues till the end of April. The climate is extremely dry and rigorous. The nights are cold and the days are warm. The dryness of climate increases with height. Extreme winter converts the moisture into snow. At the same time there is speedy evaporation by the scorching sun of summer. The air being rarefied does not offer a strong check to the direct transmission of solar rays. The more the height, the more powerful are these rays. By the beginning of the afternoon, the lower strata of the atmosphere gets heated up causing the start of fast winds which become fainter towards the late evening and stop by 10.00 p.m. or so. The rarefied air is not capable of holding much moisture in suspension. And the little it does, is evaporated by great radiation of heat. It causes dryness of climate and loss of rain and snowfall. Another hindrance to the rainfall is the opposite direction of winds to the position of mountains. The scanty showers fall mostly in early spring and late autumn.

The hill ranges are held responsible for different climatic regions. The region between Ladakh and the Himalayan range remains bone-dry because winds, carrying moisture, are stopped by the Himalayan range. Jojila is the chief barrier to such winds. In Shyok and Nubra region, the entrance of moisture bearing winds is out of questions. The snow on certain peaks is because of the precipitation of clouds formed locally from the rivers and streams. In comparison to others Nubra valley gets more snow. During early winter months the moisture sometimes turns into heavy mist. There is heavier snowfall around Pangong lake because of more humidity caused by lake water.

Breathing difficulties are experienced at higher altitudes. The dryness of atmosphere causes dehydration making body parts, specially the exposed ones, leather-like. In high altitudes the ultra-violet rays are fiercely active and complexion gets darkened with short exposure to sun-rays. But with prolonged exposure cracks appear on the facial skin. The dehydration also leads to stomach trouble. Dryness causes hazard to life, especially making animal and plant life difficult and scarce. The frost in winter, the dryness, the high velocity winds and melting snows have caused severe soil erosion and the crumbled hill sides have assumed weird shapes.

The wild life in Ladakh is rapidly vanishing because of the indiscriminate killing by the non-Ladakhis to get a fresh supply of meat. There are, however, still found though in less number, red bear, wild goat, snow leopard, wild horse, Tibetan antelope, gazelle, marmot, ibex, and hares. Chakor or snow-pheasant and black eagles are also available. On the banks of the Indus one comes across ducks, teals and swamps of Chachot. Fish abound in streams. The domesticated animals include goat, sheep, cow, yak or long haired bull, pony, dog, ass, Zo or Dso, Dso-mo, fowls, and Drepo which is the male produce between common bull and the Dso-mo.

Because of a very low rainfall (annual rainfall does not exceed three



inches) the vegetation is very sparse and scarce. The hills are quite destitute of all vegetation. The nude mountains do not grow a blade of grass. The total forest of Ladakh slightly exceeds 0.002% of the total area. Two varieties of poplar (Sholpoand Byar-pa), willow, pencil cedar (shukpa) and some kind of tamarisk are indigenous. Willow abounds in all water sources. The fruit trees found in Ladakh are apple, apricot, walnut and mulberry. These species of fruit trees grow in the lower hotter regions, say around Nurla, Saspul, Khaltse and Timagaon. The valleys are studded with green plantation and the willow and poplar trees survive on the bank of the rivers to almost a height of 14,000 ft. Sun flowers, dahlia and Ganda flowers have lately been introduced in villages around Leh. Forget-me-nots, daisies, anemones and wild canterbury also grow. Some wild bushes, largely used for fuel and fencing of fields, grow on the banks of rivers, streams and small water channels.

In certain time period the history of Ladakh is not very illuminating and one has to be satisfied with patchy accounts available here and there. For my purpose, I have dealt history in terms of territorial claims, ruling class and administrative structure.

Because of the frequent changes in the territorial boundaries of Ladakh, it was realized long back to define it once for all. The treaties of 1784 and 1842 confirmed the same boundary which was agreed upon by the representatives of Jammu and Kashmir, the Emperor of China and Dalai Lama. China, however, unilaterally and forcibly has, since 1957, tried to alter the old boundary limits in Ladakh. In fact, a few isolated Chinese posts were established on Indian border since 1957 onward challenging thereby the traditional status quo of the boundary. The road construction in Aksai Chin, an undemarcated portion of Ladakh, was started by the Chinese in 1950. There was a clash between Indian border patrols and the Chinese troops in 1958. In October 1959, the Chinese attacked on an Indian patrol in Ladakh. Nine men were killed and the rest were taken prisoners. All this was done even when the Chinese were outwardly announcing that they have no territorial claims against India. According to the Chinese, the Line of Actual Control which existed in November 1959 did include the isolated posts established by them. According to Kaul (1963) the Line of Actual Control, declared by China, has a difference of about 8,500 square miles from the real Line of Actual Control. In February 1961, a joint report in regard to boundary disputes was prepared by the representatives of India and China. The report, however, remained incomplete because it largely included the areas of disagreement. And at the same time the Chinese were not prepared to discuss anything about Baltistan, the region under the occupation of Pakistan. Under these conditions the boundaries could not be finally confirmed and according to Indian claim China continues to be in illegal occupation of 12,000 square miles of Indian territory.

In 1950, by a Ladakh-Tibetan Treaty, Rudock was added to Tibet. In 1946 Lahaul and Spiti were annexed to Punjab (now Himachal



Pradesh). The boundary changes were also marked in December 1948, after the Cease Fire agreement between India and Pakistan. Accordingly, India kept possession of Ladakh and Pakistan occupied Baltistan and Gilgit. Soon after the division of the country in 1947, Pakistan acquired some north and north-west parts of Jammu and Kashmir. This led to a clash between Indian and Pakistani troops. Government of India lodged a complaint with Security Council whose intervention led to the declaration of Cease-Fire under which the two countries kept possession of the areas held by them. Jammu and Kashmir lost 33,000 square miles of territory after Cease Fire (Census 1961:4). Gilgit district and Gilgit Leased Area went to Pakistan. From Ladakh district the biggest Tehsil of Skardu, with one hundred and ninetyfive villages, and a part of Kargil (nearly thirtyone villages) went to the other side.

Kaul (1963) has given that the Mons were the first settlers in Ladakh. They migrated from north India and were later on joined by the Dards of Baltistan. The latter introduced the game of Polo, and former the popular musical instruments. The earliest chiefs who governed Ladakh belonged to the Mon and the Dard tribes. The habitations of Mons and Dards were in the central valley of Ladakh. The Kushan and Hun rulers in Kashmir (from 3rd to 6th century A.D.) treated Ladakh within their imperial authority. In the middle of the seventh century Ladakh was subjugated by Songtsen Gampo of Central Tibet. Around 930 A.D., Palgigon, the eldest son of Kyide Byimagon ruled Ladakh. At that time Ladakh was bounded by Ramba on the east, Yarkand on the north and Jojila on the west. It has been stated by Moorecroft (1837) supported by Cunningham (1970) that Ladakh initially formed a province of Tibet. For all spiritual matters, the Head Lama of Lhasa governed Ladakh. There was an independent prince for temporal matters. Ganhar (1956) however, has not look upon Tibet as its spiritual fountain head for at least the first six centuries of the Christian era. This was because Tibet got its Buddhism towards the middle of seventh century A.D. According to him the Indian monks, including some Kashmiris, and may be a few Ladakhis, spread the Buddhist faith in Tibet. Around 400 A.D. the Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hien took notice of Ladakh and found Buddhism flourishing there.

The relationship pattern of Ladakh with the neighbouring states is well represented through political, religious and commercial links. Trade and commercial ties were with Kashmir and Yarkand, political relations with Balti and Rudock and spiritual connections with Lhasa. It was mainly towards west of Ladakh that the border tension perpetuated with frequent intervals. When Islam had spread in northern India some Muslims penetrated beyond Jojila around the middle of 14th century. In order to establish Kashmir's sovereignty over Ladakh, Zainul Abidin (1420-70) invaded Ladakh. The continuous invasions on Ladakh from Kashmir led to the change of its dynasty. Bhagal Namgyal founded the new dynasty when he deposed and imprisoned the



king in 1470. This dynasty continued till Zorawar's conquest of Ladakh in 1842. The Muslim rulers of Kashmir again attacked Ladakh in 1553 and 1562 but failed to establish themselves. Chewang Namgyal (1533-75) gave them a good fight. The same king, with his policy of consolidation and expansion turned Baltistan and Guge into vassal States. But during the course of a fratricidal war in Ladakh, after the death of Chewang Namgyal, the vassal chiefs revolted. The chief of Baltistan, Ali Mir, invaded Ladakh and compelled its ruler Jamgyang Namgyal (1580-90) to marry his daughter. Sengge Namgyal, the issue born out of this union again made Baltistan and Western Tibet to acknowledge his authority. Ali Mir took possession of whole of Ladakh and destroyed Monastic things, including libraries. Till about 1400 A.D., the history of Ladakh and Baltistan continued to be bound up together. But later on when Baltis became Mohammedans, conflicts cropped up.

In 1644 when Manchus came in power in China they instigated Tibetans for expansion to west. At that time Tibet used to be a vassal State of China. The Tibetans attacked Ladakh (around 1646) and took Indus valley in their possession for about three years. Then the king of Ladakh asked for help from the Mughal Emperor of then India. The Mughal troops defeated Tibetans in 1650 A.D. at Basgo. Deldan Namgyal (1640-75) accepted Mughal sovereignty. He accepted Islam, and in 1665 a mosque was built at Leh. Actually the Mughal army helped Ladakh ruler to retire Mongol-Tibetan army beyond ancient border. Under the conditions Namgyal started paying annual tribute to the Mughal governor of Kashmir. But when Sikhs conquered Kashmir in 1819 Ladakh snapped its link with it. When Tsepel Mingyur Dondub Namgyal (1800-34) wanted to transfer his allegiance to the British government, Gulab Singh the Dogra chief sent his army to take Ladakh in 1834. Zorawar Singh under the orders of Gulab Singh (the Raja of Jammu), led six expeditions to Ladakh between 1834 and 1841. He conquered Ladakh and Baltistan. After Zorawar's death in 1841, while fighting against Tibetans, Ladakh again declared its independence. However, Gulab Singh's title to Ladakh was confirmed after Anglo-Sikh war of 1845. Since 1947 Ladakh became a part of India after the accession of Jammu and Kashmir State to Indian union.

In the past the government was administered by the Prime Minister known as Khalun or Kahlon though there used to be a ruler, king or emperor, who bore the title of Gyalpo. The affairs were, however, mostly conducted by Kahlon. All offerings used to be given to the Gyalpo by the subjects. Kahlon's position was almost hereditary and could be given to any member of Kahlon's family. The king's favour was a major factor in Kahlon's selection. There was some recognition to the popularity and ability of person. Then there were petty Gyalpos and Kahlons called Depons or district chiefs. The district level Kahlons were also termed as Tan-zuis. These petty Kahlons were identified by their association with the names of district on which they ruled. The Kahlon



was assisted by Nuna Kahlon, or deputy, the Lom-pa or chief municipal and military officer and governor of Leh, the Chug-zat, or treasurer (who normally happened to be a Lama), the Banka, or master of the horse, Kharpon, or the commander of fort, Shakspon, or the chief justice and Khrimpons or the magistrates. At village level, Goba or Mipon (headman of the village) looked after the affairs. Criminal and revenue matters were directly communicated by Goba to Kahlons and Chug-zat or Chagsot. Most of these officials were paid through assignment of land and through claims on the people for contributions of articles of daily use. The income from imports on merchandise in transit were divided among the king, Kahlon and the Lim-pa or Lon-po. The major source of their income, however, remained the trade which they carried on in shawl, wool and tea.

The Kahlon, Lon-po and Goba were also to furnish armed soldiers to government whenever required. It has been reported that there was no regular army in Ladakh. In case of need each family was to supply one man to act as soldier. The family also managed to feed him during this deputation. The arms, horse and pony were also supplied by the family. Kahlons and Gobas were given title of honour for their supply of troops and the accessories. Thus, there was an armed peasantry in place of regular army. Since Zorawar's time some regular army was raised in Ladakh. In addition, the Goba of every village was bound to provide a carrier for carrying the mail from his village to the next one.

Featherstone (1926:219) has stated that "The administration of Ladakh is in charge of Wazir Wazarat. He has little to do, for crime is rare, the chief complaints being over plots of land and stealing of fuel and trees. His main function is supervision of trade in the summer months. He is assisted by subordinates in various districts who are responsible for helping carabaners and furnishing animals and grains. A British official, known as the British Joint Commissioner in Ladakh, who resides in Leh during part of the summer months, looks after the interest of traders and all matters of importance are placed before him".

For traders, travellers and sportsmen the State made adequate arrangements. State Kothis, containing grains, were maintained on the Treaty High Road (Srinagar, Leh and beyond) at Drass, Kargil, Lamayuru, Saspul, Leh and Panamik. Wheat and Giram were available. The local shopkeepers at Drass, Kargil and Leh arranged for rice and dals. Indents, within the entitlement limit, were given to the Kothis by the needy. The British Joint Commissioner also appointed Parao Thekadars (contractors) at various places, enroute, to arrange for the supply of butter, milk, fowls, eggs, sheep, oil, firewood and grass. For all commodities the parao rates were fixed. Besides this the administration had introduced Res System for the benefit of traders and travellers. An account of the Res System, as prevalent in 1931, runs in the sentences that follow. 'Res is a system by which a village or group of villages is bound to supply transport for certain stages on certain roads. The word



transport means and includes men and animals and for carrying passengers and goods from place to place. There were limits to Res transport for various station—ponies, Zos and coolies were fixed. Public servants, bonafide travellers and Central Asian traders were entitled to use Res transport. The use was confined to personal luggage, in the case of first two categories and merchandise in the case of traders. A pony carried two-and-a-half maunds of weight, a coolie carried 35 seers in Summer and 25 seers in winter. Res transport could be used only on Treaty High Road. For all purposes of the road transport, arrangement must be made through local Zaildar. Res register was filled by the user with details. In case of a large camp staying in a village where there is no regular stage, its requirements of transport were met in due proportion by the group of villages to which that village belonged under the Res arrangements. There were fixed rates, varying from place to place for pony and coolie'.

After Indian Independence when Ladakh became a district of Jammu and Kashmir State of India, the territory was first politically represented by Kushok Bakula (the head of Spituk monastery) when he became the Minister of Ladakh affairs in Jammu and Kashmir State in 1963. After that Kushok Bakula was nominated, and later elected too, as a member of Indian parliament. In addition to Kushok Bakula, Wanggyal became a Minister in State Legislature. The civil administration of Ladakh is now headed by the Deputy Commissioner-cum Development Commissioner. For any and every matter, he is directly responsible to the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir who handles the money allotted by the Central Government. Besides civil administration, the military and para-military organisations have also been serving in Ladakh after 1947.

## Ethnic Composition and Social Stratification

Ladakh is represented by two major population groups. The Ladakhis and other followers of Buddhism are inhabiting Leh and Zaskar; while the Muslims are largely concentrated in Kargil. In fact the Muslims are spread between the Himalayan and the Zaskar ranges, specially between the Jojila and Fotula depressions. The Indus valley is populated by the Buddhists.

In Ladakh there has been blending of various population groups. Some of the Aryans, represented by the Dards and the Mons, got mixed up with the people of Mongolian origin. Presently the Ladakhis, including Chanspa of Chang-thang area, and the Baltis represent the Mongolian element. The Baltis profess Islamic faith and the Ladakhis are Buddhists. The Dards, the Mons and the Bedas represent the Aryan element. But because of intermixing, the Mons and the Bedas do not seem to be categorically distinct from the Ladakhis. The Dards, however, do represent, till today, as a different racial group. The Mons are the Buddhists and the Bedas are usually the Muslims. There are a few Muslim Mons and Buddhist Beda too. The Mons who opted for Islam were termed as the Bedas. This derivation, however, does not seem to hold true in all the cases. Some of the Dardis adopted Buddhist faith and came to be known as Dogpa or Brogpa. The religion of the people of Nubra valley has been affected by the religions prevalent in Sinkiang and Pakistan on the one hand, and Buddhism of Shyok on the other. Even among the people living in the north of the Ladakh range, especially in the Nubra valley, some admixture of blood is marked. There is some resemblance to the Turkish physical features.

More elaborately the Ladakhi population is categorised into the following distinct groups :

1. Ladakhi or Bhoto, Boto, Bhautta, Bodh, Bodpa
2. Mon (Masician—flute player)
3. Gara (Ironsmith)
4. Beda (Musician—Drum player)
5. Muslims, including Balti, Kashmiri and Argons
6. Chanspa or Changpa (Pastoralists of highland)
7. Christians
8. Hindus belonging to various caste groups



9. Sikhs
10. Dogpa or Brokpa
11. Dard
12. Tibetans (lately colonized in Ladakh)

Some of these groups follow specific occupation, the rest have more than one occupation. Within the ethnic heterogeneity of Ladakh, the Mons and the Dards are regarded as the earliest inhabitants. They were followed by the people from Tibet, Baltistan and Central Asia. Now almost every Buddhist village, of an average size, has one or two families of the Mon, the Gara and the Beda. They are treated, by others, as socially inferior. The Garas are blacksmiths and the Mons and the Bedas are the musicians. A few beggar Bedas have also been observed. The Mons are considered as the descendants of an Indian tribe of colonists associated with early Buddhist missionaries.

The word Ladakhi does not refer to any and every inhabitant of Ladakh. It does signify a specific ethnic group. Ladakhi apart, the other synonyms of this ethnic group are Bhot, Bod, Bodh, Bot-pa, Bhautta or Bota. And it is chiefly on this group that this study is focused. The word Bhot, in fact, refers to Buddhist Tibetans. When this nomenclature is applied to the inhabitants beyond Jajila, it reflects that these people have originally migrated from Tibet. Some of my informants from Spituk village have informed that their ancestors came from China. And those who came initially were not the Buddhists. The immigrants adopted Buddhism in later years. The statement supports that the Ladakhis came to Ladakh prior to the spread of Buddhism in the area. Differing from above is the version of another group of Ladakhi informants who profess that their ancestors came from Mongolia and Tibet between 500 to 600 A.D. In support of this explanation, people say that the Ladakhis living towards Kargil are still termed as Pot-rik, meaning Tibetan generation. It shows that they are the descendants of Tibetans. Cunningham gives Mongolian origin of the Ladakhis and states that they now differ from Mongolian because of the admixture of Hindu blood, especially the mixture with the Caucasian race of India. The intermixing of Ladakhis with the Muslim has also been reported. The Ladakhi women embraced Islamic faith after marrying the Muslims.

With high and prominent cheek bones, the Ladakhis have broad and flat faces. Some obliquity is marked in the eyes having an epicanthic fold. The mouth is large with prominent lips. The nostrils are quite wide and the nose is broad as well as flat. The colour of the eyes is black to brown. They have scanty hair growth. The head hair are straight to slight wavy. Women are short statured but the men have a medium height. Some are tall also. The Ladakhis are sturdy but not very muscular. Their actions involving physical exertion are slow. This



is in adjustment with the high altitude and lack of oxygen. Breathlessness is caused if the actions are fast.

The dialect of the Ladakhis is called Ladakhi and it is most akin to Tibetan. Bodhi is their written language and this is little different from Tibetan and is a mixture of Tibetan and Ladakhi. Printing of a monthly journal in Bodhi, known as "Ladakh News" was started in 1903 by the people of Moravian mission in Leh. The language of the Ladakhis is associated with Tibeto-Burmese family. Instance of admixture of Hindi and English is also reported.

The Ladakhis are very cheerful people and try to make any event as gaiety. This cheerfulness is manifest in their singing, dancing and drinking Chang, a mild intoxicant. For recreation and amusement the men and the women sing and dance. This is usually done in groups. Dancing is considered as good quality of a person, and is regarded as favourite pastime. It may be mentioned that in olden days the king's gloom was also dispelled by Takchos or dancing females. Such females represented good families and felt proud of their dancing skill. With their known hospitality, the Ladakhis are quite friendly, simple and docile. Their account of simplicity, as given by Major Singh, is worthy of mention. "The simplicity of Ladakhi is so naïve and unaffected that one is both amused and drawn spontaneously to him". Perhaps the best illustration of this charming trait is provided by a remark of an American Journalist I read in 1963. A Ladakhi father had taken his children to the Leh airfield to show them and indeed see for himself, the plane land and take off. They saw a packet land, unload its cargo of two jeeps and take off again. The jeeps were driven away across the landing strip. The father was heard remarking to his children, "My sons, these two babies (jeeps) too will grow wings and then one day fly off like their mother, yonder" (1969:13). Their love for hospitality is reflected when they quickly refill your cup of Chang or Gur Gur (tea) as soon as you take a sip out of the filled cup.

They are not offensive and have been tolerant and accommodating people from other religious faiths. The instances of marriage between Muslims and Ladakhis are many. Patience and tolerance are inseparable from Ladakhi way of life. The Ladakhis are honest and truthful. Lately, however, some change in regard to their honesty, truthfulness and tolerance have been marked. Their passion for peace and straightforwardness have partly been adversely affected after the closer contact with the outsiders. The Ladakhis, however, continue to be mild and frank in the more isolated localities. Good-tempered, the Ladakhis maintain their laugh even in certain adverse circumstances. They are comparatively poor but at the same time willing. Most of them believe in having minimum wants and necessities of life. Barring some, the rest are contented with whatever little material possession they have.

People are free of untouchability. They are very social beings and avail of any opportunity in which Chang is used. Another charac-



teristic of the Ladakhis is that they normally do not stick to fixed hours or parts of the day for most of their activities. Those in employment have started becoming regular. Others eat and drink any time. In fact most of the time one finds them eating and drinking. The Ladakhis are very fond of gossiping. In winter, when outside activities are curtailed, they keep on gossiping inside the house. Most of them do not smoke. They are, however, fond of taking snuff in leisure hours. Tobacco smoking is considered as vice. A few, specially those in regular employment, have started smoking cigarette. Common man apart, the Lamas also make use of snuff. They find it stimulant and exchange pinch of snuff when meet each other.

The Ladakhis are fond of archery and often organize competitions for the same. The competition is turned into a festive occasion when the participants, and even others, consume lot of Chang and Gur Gur. The competition, accompanied by loud music, provided by the Mon and Beda, continues for the whole day, or even for two days. The funds used on the occasion are raised from the participants. Prizes, in cash, are given to the winners. A part of the amount is given to the musicians. The Lamas also organize archery competitions which close with group singing and dancing.

The systematic organization of Darsis (archery competition) is in itself an interesting feature. It includes amusement, entertainment, competition, outing, community feeling, unity, and the break of monotony in life. A day is fixed by Narpu, the organizer of archery. Some contributions, in cash, are raised from all the probable participants. The subscription money is used for giving away the prizes to the winners as well as for providing Chang and Gur Gur. The place, which is usually an open space in or around the village, and the day of the competition are then announced. The villagers turn up in high spirits with bows and arrows. On this occasion the ladies and gents are nicely dressed. A target to hit the arrow is then fixed in a sand heap. This target is normally a small cardboard piece attached to the head of a wooden stick fixed in the sand. A line on the ground is then marked at a distance of 10 to 15 yards from the target. All the bows and arrows are kept near this line. The competition is between the individuals, as also between the teams. Fixed number of chances are given to each individual to hit the target. An experienced man is appointed as referee. He informs the recorder about the correct and accurate hits. The game of archery starts around 10.00 a.m. and continues till sun set. The participants keep on sipping Chang and Gur Gur as and when required. Towards the close of the competition the men and the women dance with loud singing. Such a group dance marks the end of function.

The archery competitions are organized even by the religious persons. After Lumb-rim worship, the Kushok (head of monastery) and Lamas of Spituk Gompa (monastery) organized archery competition for two days during the course of my fieldwork. The Kushok, Lochos, inaugurated



it by shooting first arrow at the target. So long as the Kushok sat there, he initiated for all the rounds of competition. A Mon and a Beda were operating on the traditional music. Some villagers, including the Kotwal, were helping the Lamas in the preparation of Gur Gur and food. My entry and participation in the function were also allowed and appreciated by the Kushok and other Lamas. I happened to know most of them as I was staying and working in that village. The religious men were sitting in line, keeping in view their religious seniority, with table in front of each, having cups of Gur Gur and some other eatables. A few villagers, especially the prominent ones, also participated after seeking permission from Kushok. For both the days, the dancing and singing were arranged towards the close of the competition. The religious persons arranged their sitting and dancing separate from the common village folks. During day time too, the Lamas sat on a slightly raised platform a bit separate from general public. At times the Lamas did some dramatic gestures to provide humour to the spectators. Every participant who hit the target was given prize; the amount varying from time to time. Out of cash prize, the winner gave rupees five to Dum Dum-walas (musicians). The occasion was full of fun and laughter.

The Argons or Argands originated from Kashmiri Muslim father and Ladakhi mother. Such alliances took place in Leh where Kashmiri Muslims came for trade and commerce. Some, however, explain that the Argons have not only descended from Kashmiri Muslim fathers but are mixed breed of Indian state soldiers and other male traders who kept the Ladakhi females as temporary wives also. According to Hedin (1910), a Yarkandi father and Lamaist mother's union produced a race, called Argon distinguished by extraordinarily well developed muscular stature. His single parentage version does not seem to be correct. While writing about Argons, Featherstone (1926:213) has stated that "They are the result of a cross between a Turkestan father and a Ladakhi mother. They have a kind of monopoly of the transport of goods between Leh and Yarkand. They are said to be increasing in numbers as they have a home both in Yarkand and Leh, with a wife or two in each place. The fact of a Ladakhi woman pairing with Turcoman trader during the trading season appears to carry with it no stigma. This comparative looseness of the marriage tie is shown more particularly in the system of fraternal polyandry".

In the villages around Leh, where the Argons are largely concentrated, it was observed that the dress, houses, language and economy of the Argons are exactly like the Ladakhis. In certain ceremonies, observed by the Buddhists, the Argons participate in the same style as the other Ladakhis do. Such participation was specially observed in Nang-Dun, a ceremony observed after the birth of a child in Sabu village. In the ceremonial sphere of Ladakhis, where the Argons participate, the former do reciprocate. Such situations mark fusion of Islamic and Buddhist cultural traits.



The Chanspa (also known as Chanpa or Changpa) are herders and lead a nomadic life. They domesticate goats and sheep. These tent-dwellers lead a very hard life and keep on migrating according to weather conditions and availability of pasturage for the animals. The Chanspas also keep the horses, mules, yaks and dogs. Their nomadic cycle is confined to the south-east of Ladakh. While mobile, the Chanspas ride on horse back and use sheep, mules and yaks as pack animals. Apart from cattle breeding, the trade is also a source of earning. I happened to meet some Chanspas between Dungti and Demchok and observed that they maintain very unhygienic condition. Bearing long head hair, the Chanspas are quite strong. In the solitude of high hills, their animals are their best company. The Chanspa nomads are basically pastoralists and are the closest friends of nature. Featherstone stresses on a close ethnic association of Chanspas with Ladakhis. According to him "the Chanspas are a class of Ladakhis who are nomads and follow pastoral pursuits in the uplands which are too high for cultivation" (1926:180).

The Dards live in a few villages in the lower Indus valley, especially around Hanu-Dah. They remain under dirty and unhygienic conditions. It is believed by them that if they use water for bathing and washing purposes their deity would get annoyed and cause harm to them. The water, they believe, is meant only for drinking. For Dards, the drinking of cow's milk and eating of eggs is taboo. The cow is held in abhorrence. Even the butter is not produced by them. At night they do not use light in their houses. The darkness is believed to be preferred by the deity. The Dards depend on agriculture. Within the bounds of religious fear, the Dards continue to maintain their age-old customs, traditions and manneis. While greeting each other they twirl their hats in front of them. The girls are allowed to have friends and the latter are represented by needles haning in their hats. Some of the Dards have adopted Buddhist faith and consequently termed a Brogpas or Dogmas. Many of the Dards became Muslims and adopted Islamic way of life. The Dards of Da, however, continue to retain originality in most of their life-designs. Among Dards the women are marked with sun bonnets and Nordic features. Some of the Dards whom I met in Leh, when they had come there on short trip, were having rosy cheeks, with lot of dirt on them. Each woman had as many as ten to fifteen hair plates hanging all around the cheeks and the neck. They are free in thier movements, though not indulging indiscriminate mixing. With their typical hair-do, dress and physical features, the Dards could be easily distinguished in the crowd of Leh.

### Social Stratification

All the four villages studied by me are predominantly Buddhist. Ladakhi apart the other Buddhist population in these villages is represen-

ted by the Gara, Mon and Beda. Except Kuyul, each of the other three villages is having one family each of Gara, Mon and Beda. In Spituk, Sabu and Thiksay live a small number of Baltis and Argons. Though small in number, these five ethnic groups have had, since past, a specific relationship not only among themselves but also with the dominant Ladakhis. Set customary norms of behaviour and inter-relationship exist, and the same are reflected in different ways of life. Some of these groups are also characterised by a definite social hierarchy. These groups apart some Tibetan refugees have lately been settled near Spituk and Sabu and they too are treated by the Ladakhis in a specific way. For centuries the Ladakhis are living together with Gara, Mon, Beda, Balti and Argon. Simultaneous to the inequality and stratification in social positions of various groups, the village community involves interdependence among the members of these groups. The social hierarchy of the village community is as under :

#### Buddhist

1. Ladakhi or Bhoto, Boto, Bhautta etc. (Also known as Mangric)
  2. Gara
  3. Mon
  4. Beda
- } Also known as Dolba

#### Muslim

1. Balti
2. Argon

The Ladakhis are agriculturists and the animal husbandry men. They are in the stream of peasantry though, in the past, they were involved in trading with Central Asian countries, Yarkhand and Kashmir. Some of them also go in for carpentry and masonry works. After 1947, when Government of India created additional employment avenues, many Ladakhis have joined services. Under the massive programmes of development of Ladakh there is great scope for labour employment. The Bhoto men and women are seen working, usually as unskilled labourers, in various construction sites. They rear various kinds of animals and own big herds of cattle, especially of sheep and goats. Some people are involved in tending cattle to high-lands in summer. In winter they come down to low-lands. Such a mobility is conditioned by the availability of pastures for the cattle. While mobile they live in tents which they carry along. Some of the animal products help to enrich the Ladakhi diet. Next to Gompa, the Bhotos are the chief owners of cultivable land. But still there are some landless Ladakhis who depend on other means than the agriculture.

The Garas have been doing blacksmithy. They continue to prepare and provide all kinds of iron implements and tools to the needy villagers.



Some of them also own land and do agriculture as a subsidiary occupation. The Ladakhis consider Gara as socially low because of the blacksmithy profession. In Tibet too, from where the Ladakhis are believed to have come, a blacksmith ranks lower. Between Gara and other ethnic groups in the village there is a specific kind of relationship involving rendering of service and returns. It does, to some extent, resemble the Jajmani (patron-client) system of caste society of plain India. For any iron tool or implement, to be made from Gara, the needy ones supply the iron. The workmanship is provided by the Gara, and for which he gets the traditionally prescribed remuneration in cash as well as kind. Under the system, as prevalent in Spituk, a Gara makes and repairs various iron implements throughout the year for the families whom he serves. He also provides, locks and keys. In return, he gets seven to fifteen seers of wheat from each family he serves. More of it is given after the harvesting is over, and the rest before the start of sowing. At times the Gara is also given butter. In addition a Gara also receives Bojha (headload of fodder) from every family for whom he makes and repairs iron implements. On the occasion of a worship organized in a Ladakhi house, the Gara, Mon and Beda do attend. They are served meals over there, and while returning each of them is given a bag of Sattu (flour of baked wheat and barley). One bag weighs about a kilogramme. On the day of Losar, a Ladakhi festival, the Gara supplies iron needles to each family he serves and gets food in return and about a kilogramme of Sattu. When a child is born in a family the Gara is given two seers of Sattu. In marriage he gets food and Sattu.

The Mons and Bedas are professional musicians. They have been, for centuries, playing on flutes and drums. Musical performance is a prerequisite to certain celebrations connected to Ladakhi life and culture. By and large the Mons and Bedas are landless and work as labourers whenever they find themselves free from giving musical performance. A few of the Mons own small acreage of cultivable land. Some are also engaged in carpentry. A few of the Bedas, specially the landless ones, depend on begging. As beggars they move from village to village. Such beggars are mostly the Buddhist Bedas who move with their tents and stop at a place convenient to their requirements. They keep dogs and pack animals, usually the donkeys. The Mons are permanently settled and thinly scattered, having one or two families in each village. The land-owning Mons do not cultivate it themselves. Rather, they get it cultivated by a Bhoto who is in possession of resource for the purpose. On most of the occasions the musicians, in attendance, are served Gur Gur, Chang, and food. Money is given only in the occasions of marriage and birth. A main source of income to a Mon musician is the annual gift which he receives from all the peasant families after the harvesting of crops is over. Depending upon the economic status each peasant family spares two to five seers of wheat, Grim or barley for the Mon family. This act is more or less obligatory for the Ladakhis, and is done



in recognition of the services of Mon. On the occasion of Losar the Mon offers an arrow to the male and a spinner to the female of all the families he serves. These articles are offered only to the senior members who reciprocate through the offering of food and Sattu. During the course of Gyud, a dance performed at the time of marriage, the Mon and Beda musicians get rupees two to three after every round. At the start of sowing of crops the Goru songs are sung by the Mons and Bedas. These songs are sung in praise of the cultivators, livestock and the crops. In return they get two kilogrammes of grain from each family. After harvesting the Mon and Beda visit all Ladakhi families and provide Larango music. They are given grain and salt on the occasion. After a death the Mon and Beda are offered two kilogrammes of Sattu each.

Dun a birth ceremony is a major occasion of earning for Mon and Beda. They not only get grain but also a cash award of rupees five each, after every round of Dun dance. The Mon and Gara provide music even to Argon and Balti and are suitably rewarded.

Most of the Baltis and the Argons are agriculturists. They own land more or less on equal footing with the Ladakhis. Some got into regular employment. There are still others who survive on labour job. Except religion their life-ways are akin to the Ladakhis. The Baltis, however, consider the Argons as socially inferior. This is attributed to the latter's outcome from Muslim father and Ladakhi mother. They are, in fact, not taken as pure Muslims. At times the Ladakhis and Argons share each other's ceremonial life. It may be mentioned that religious drifts on the part of Ladakhis have been frequent and the people, in the past, did tolerate them without being perturbed. Many Ladakhis turned Muslims and vice-versa. Ali, a Muslim from Spituk, married a Buddhist girl and embraced Buddhism. He continues to be treated like any other Buddhist. All his sons have married in Ladakhi Buddhist families. It could also be reported that members of a family follow different religious faiths even while staying together in the same house. They work together enjoying the liberty of cultivating individual religious faith. In Thiksay two real brothers, one Christian and another a Buddhist, were observed living together. They share a common kitchen and eat together. If a Buddhist, turned Christian, does not find a Christian girl to marry he can go for a Buddhist girl. The Buddhists do not take the act with any seriousness, knowing that the Christian families are only few and do not have enough girls of marriageable age. There is no compulsion on the girl to become Christian after she marries a Christian boy.

### **Areas of social differentiation**

In the village layout no definite places have been marked for the members of different ethnic groups. It is not that the Ladakhis, being socially higher in position, would occupy a particular section where none



other would be accommodated. I could observe Mon's house near to that of a Ladakhi. Also the house of a Gara, in Spituk, is centrally located and surrounded by those of the Ladakhis. The position is, thus, not like a multicaste village of plain India where, in most of the cases, various sections are typically marked by the specific caste groups. The village layout is independent of religious consideration too. The houses of a Balti and a Bhoto, in Spituk, are just adjoining to each other. However, a common pattern, which symbolises the social superiority of the Ladakhis over others, is that the houses of the Bhotos are nearer to the Gompa (monastery). In general the houses, belonging to others than the Ladakhis, are built little away from Gompa.

A Ladakhi, being socially superiormost in Buddhist order of village community, describes the positions of Gara, Mon and Beda through an analogy with arrow. A Gara's position is comparable to the ironhead of an arrow; a Mon's to the thread work, in between iron-head and the shafty, and the Beda's position as equivalent to the shaft, the last portion of the arrow.

There is no customarily proposed taboo for entry into houses belonging to any group. But in actual practice some people express reluctance. I could observe that the members from higher group were usually reluctant to enter into the houses of Gara, Mon and Beda. My interpreter, in Spituk, was a Ladakhi and I could, at times, smell his unwillingness to accompany me to the house of Gara, Mon and Beda. He would prefer to stand outside their residence. Even the Gara, Mon and Beda were least eager to take me, and my interpreter, inside their houses. This was not because their houses were shabby. Those owning better houses were also reluctant, largely out of their inferior social status. The latter feeling also made them hesitant to offer me, and my interpreter, Chang or Gur Gur. Contrary to Spituk my interpreter in Thiksay was a Mon. He would not straight enter into any Ladakhi house. He stopped till the owner called for it. Further, the Gara, Mon and Beda would always wish a Ladakhi first by uttering Zu-Zu (style of wishing). The Ladakhis do not prefer to have a Gara, Mon and Beda teacher in their school because their children, in that case, will have to say Zu-Zu to him. The Gara, Mon and Beda social inferiority is more conspicuous in certain spheres.

On the occasion of a worship or feast, organized by a Ladakhi family, invitees are made to sit according to a fixed pattern. This order is traditionally fixed in the light of the positions assigned to the individuals and the groups to which they belong. For instance the positions, marked as superior in the order of arrangement, would be occupied by the Ladakhis alone. Next, in order, would come the Gara who would then be followed by the Mon and Beda respectively. Even the serving of food is regulated in the same process. The Ladakhi tables kept in front of the invitees are of different sizes. The biggest, in size is kept in front of the Ladakhi, if Lamas are not there in the feast. The size of the tables then gradually



decreases while coming to Gara. The Mons and the Bedas are not served on the tables. Generally they receive food either in the hands or on some leaf, or in their personal utensils which they carry. It may be mentioned that the traditional pattern of sitting is not strictly observed in any other gathering of the villagers. For instance when the villagers gather to see a documentary film or a drama they may sit wherever they find convenient. But the privilege of acting as spokesman on the occasion again goes to the Ladakhis. When any dignitary visits the village the Bhotos come forward to receive. The Gara, Mon and Beda quietly retreat. Also, as a norm of their relationship the former are never interrupted by the latter during the course of a discussion. Normally the Gara, Mon and Beda keep quiet and this speaks of their submissiveness to the superior group of Bhotos. Such an order of precedence was confirmed more than once during the course of my stay in Ladakhi villages.

In regard to commensal relations the avoidance of inferiors is not that sharply defined within the traditional framework. A Ladakhi can dine in the house of a Gara, Mon and Beda. There are no customary norms to prevent him in taking food in the houses of socially inferior people. But in actual practice the Ladakhis avoid to eat with one of the other pretence, in a Mon or Beda house. But they easily join a Gara. The restriction is not for food but for the container in which it is served. A common container cannot be used by the members of all the groups. They have to be served in separate utensils. Some of the Ladakhis have stated that they can eat in the houses of Mon and Beda if the food served to them is cooked by the Ladakhis. The Gara, Mon and Beda join in all the feasts arranged by the Ladakhis. On such occasions, the Mon and Beda either bring their own containers, or manage otherwise. Normally, a Ladakhi family does not provide them containers. The Balti and Argon are treated at par with the Ladakhis. A Ladakhi can eat in the houses of Balti and Argon and vice versa. The commensal interaction is more frequent between Ladakhi and Argon than between Ladakhi and Balti. The rules governing eating reflect on smoking too. The number of smokers is, however less in Buddhist society of Ladakhi. Smoking, under the religious cover, is regarded as a vice. A Ladakhi smoker does not circulate the same cigarette to a Gara, Mon or Beda. He rather restricts it among the Ladakhis. The same form of restriction is imposed in the matter of drinking Chang and Gur Gur. The Gara, Mon and Beda can share a drink with Ladakhi, but not in the same cup. The application of rule is more severe for Mon and Beda. While sharing a drink they do sit together but with their respective cups. Same is repeated with the Argon and the Balti. The Baltis do not consume Chang. But some of the Argons do take it. The impositions are, thus, quite akin to the caste society. But the Ladakhis are not that right. Members from all the groups make use of the common drinking water source. Neither anyone is denied the use of this source, nor they have



different springs for different groups. So much so that anybody reaching the spring first is given the first chance. It is not that a Ladakhi gets priority over others.

In the formation of Phasphun (it refers to a group of families whose members help each other in the event of a birth or death) the social inequality is taken into account. The Ladakhis will have a Phasphun represented by their families alone. A Gara can never join a Ladakhi as his Phasphun member. Even if there is only one family of Mon in the village his Phasphun would consist of the families of Mons belonging to other villages. He is never allowed to have a Ladakhi or Gara or Beda Phasphun.

In the sphere of connubial relations the custom demands of each group to be endogamous. No regular marriage can be contracted between the members of two different groups. It is exactly akin to the characteristic of caste. Customarily the marital alliances are not appreciated outside one's own group. But at the same time some couples are found representing different groups. Such unions are not the outcome of regular marriages. Rather, they are the result of friendship developed between the members belonging to different groups. When a boy and a girl, from two different groups, develop friendship they decide to live together as husband and wife. In most of such cases the girl is from a socially superior group. The male members from Ladakhi group do not aspire for the females of Gara, Mon and Beda. They are not even easily attracted by the Argon and Balti females. The Ladakhi females have been taken, as wives, by the Muslims, though not through the normal marriage procedures. A Ladakhi female, after marrying a Gara, would become Gara for all practical purposes. Some of the Gara informants have stated that their marriage celebrations are suppressed by the Ladakhis. The latter do not appreciate a better display of dances and dresses in Gara, Mon and Beda marriages. The idea involved is to keep Gara, Mon and Beda at a lower footing than that of the Ladakhis. A Gara wearing better clothes or riding a better horse would upset a Ladakhi who would comment that the fellow is trying to forget his traditional position. He may, at times, be even asked to live like a commoner. The Ladakhis do not like the social elevation of Gara, Mon and Beda. At times their coming up is hindered. For instance when Phiang, a Gara, got employment in Indian Tibet Border Police, the Goba (a Ladakhi village headman) and other elderly Ladakhis of the village approached the authorities to cancel his appointment. The argument, put forward, was that with his appointment nobody would be left in the village to do ironsmithy. The members of dominant group feel that the artisan groups should continue to serve them as before.

Anyone irrespective of his group affiliation, can express sorrow over the death of a person. A dead body is cremated by the Ladakhi as well as by the Mon, Gara and Beda. The Muslim Bedas, however, bury it. The cremation ground is not common for all. Usually the Phasphuns share



a common crematorium. At the time of death, families from all the groups utilize the services of Lamas. The latter are not meant for Ladakhis alone. But then the social position again counts in the matter of carrying the dead body. The Ladakhis do not help carrying the dead body of a person belonging to any group lower than them. Thus, a Bhoto would never carry the dead body of a Gara, Mon and Beda. According to the principle followed, the dead body of a person can be carried to the cremation ground only by the men of the dead man's group, or by those who occupy a socially lower position than the one of dead. In the absence of members from the same group the Ladakhi may, however, help to carry the dead body even if it belongs to a lower social group. This is however, rare and unusual.

The entire Buddhist population, including Ladakhi, Gara, Mon, Beda and Tibetans, have access to Gompa. All can worship the gods and goddesses housed therein. In tune with the Ladakhis, the Mon and the Beda do make offerings and are free to consult Lamas and Kushok as and when required. The Lamas visit their houses to perform worship. The religious protection is equally shared. With all this the religion has again denied one privilege, enjoyed by the Ladakhis, to the socially inferior groups of Gara, Mon and Beda. The Ladakhis and others meet differential treatment in the selection of Kushok (head of monastery) as well as in the formation of Lamas (monks) and the Chomos (nuns). The Ladakhi children can become Lamas and Chomos. But the Mon, Gara and Beda, of the same village, are not allowed this concession. Kushok from the socially inferior group has never been heard of. Even if a Mon is willing to make his son Lama he is not allowed to do so. In spite of their sharing a common Gompa and a common religious faith, the members of the socially inferior groups have been deprived of the concession. In almost every house there is a worship room and anyone, from any of the groups, can enter into it. For this purpose the entry into the house of a Ladakhi is not blocked for Gara, Mon and Beda. That a Ladakhi alone can become a Lama or Chomo is itself a point of superiority for him.

Another feature, more like the caste characteristic, is that the Ladakhi's social superiority is also explained on the basis of occupation. The Ladakhis' who are basically agriculturists and animal husbandrymen, regard blacksmithy as a low profession. The Garas, who are blacksmiths, have thus, been given a lower social status. Likewise those who play music are underrated. Except in case of a few the traditional professional set-up continues to be intact. Lately some artisan families have switched on to agriculture and labour. Many of them now work as civilian labourers in army organisations. This kind of job is also done by the Ladakhis. But even under new set-up a Mon plays on drum whenever he finds time. Likewise the Beda acts as flute player and Gara as blacksmith. The Ladakhis still treat Gara, Mon and Beda as serving class who serve them whenever required. On certain occasions it is



obligatory for Gara, Mon and Beda to serve the Ladakhis—a system more akin to caste Hindus. For the service rendered they get the prescribed remuneration in cash or kind. The instance of professional change, marked in recent years, has neither affected the social positions of various groups nor their role-system. The Ladakhis are of the opinion that the affiliation with a particular group is determined by birth and not by his change of occupation.

Gara, Mon and Beda inferiority is again reflected in the celebration of festive occasions at village or inter-village level. Only the Ladakhis dominate the scene in respect of participation. The people from the socially inferior groups do come but chiefly as observers. The archery competition is quite a popular festive occasion. Most of the villagers gather to participate. But the Mon, Gara and Beda are not permitted to shoot an arrow. Nobody would prefer to join their team. The Argons and the Baltis are, however, allowed to shoot. They are also allowed to share all jokes and fun. In certain other functions if at all the members from other groups, than the Ladakhis are allowed to participate they are given the roles rated as inferior and which the Ladakhis themselves would not be keen to perform. For instance, the performance of music, symbolised with inferiority, is always assigned to the Mon and Beda. Sitting in one corner, slightly far off they play on their instruments as and when required. The right of full participation is denied even to the Garas who are rated as next to the Bhoto. In sacred dramas and dances, which pave way to cultural transmission and provide entertainment, only the Lamas participate. Indirectly, this is again the privilege of Ladakhis because it is only they who can become the Lamas. Where sitting arrangement is made a due recognition is given to the status of the group. If it is a religious function the Lamas sit first. And if it is secular one the first position is occupied by the descendants of nobles the Kahlons, followed by Goba, elderly persons from Bhoto group, the Gara, Mon and Beda. The Baltis and the Argons sit separately.

In spite of the fact that the Gara, Mon and Beda form integral part of village community they are not given any position in leadership hierarchy. Their say in matters connected to socio-political control of the village is minimum. The Ladakhis provide social control mechanism and the rest adhere to the same. In all the villages the leadership continues to be in the hands of Ladakhis. The Goba and the Members (sectional heads) are the agencies controlling life in the village. These positions, filled through selection, have always been denied to Gara, Mon and Beda. The latter being in minority, are not in a position to assert for any position. A support to Ladakhi, in the context of village leadership, is the Gompa with which the village is attached. The Gompa organization, especially the Kushok and Chag-zot (the treasurer) have a say in the selection of Goba. As the Gompa hierarchy is always represented by the Ladakhis, they prefer to have a Ladakhi headman of the village.

Most of the Ladakhis consider Argons and Baltis as equal to them



in social status. The latter's rating as equal to the Ladakhis is accepted in spite of their professing Islamic faith. Marriages between Ladakhi, Argon and Balti are traditionally forbidden. But they do eat in each other's house (exception being some Baltis who do not eat in the houses of Ladakhis). There is no bar to their entry into the houses; the Argon and the Balti can even enter into the kitchen of a Ladakhi. The Muslims, however, avoid their entry into the worship room and the Gompas of Ladakhis. In functions and on other occasions they can join. But their participation in Ladakhi functions is not much. For any event of social control at village level they normally submit to the leadership of Ladakhis. Because of their belonging to a different religion, the Argon and the Baltis do not become the Lamas and the Chomos. Otherwise, in normal life they freely mix with each other. Many of the Ladakhi girls are married to the Muslim men. A regular marriage, however, is forbidden with the Muslim. When a Ladakhi girl and Muslim boy develop friendship they decide to live as husband and wife. In most of such cases the girl adopts Islam. Cases have also been reported where the boy, after such union, adopted Buddhism. Converts of this kind are treated as equal to the Ladakhis for all practical purposes. Even such families enjoy superiority over the Gara, Mon and Beda. As an example, a Muslim 'X' from Spituk village married a Ladakhi girl. With the efforts of Kushok this man adopted Buddhism. All his sons were later on married to Ladakhi girls. Their participation in other Buddhist ceremonies is like any other Ladakhi. With Kushok's effort the man was also allotted some land for cultivation. The Baltis maintain their social superiority over Argons. A few of the Baltis regard their social status as the highest in the village. Thus, the Balti family of Spituk does not believe in having more relationship with even the Bhotos of the village. The members of this family consider the Ladakhis inferior in religion as well as social grading. At the most they accept dry Sattu from the Ladakhis. Anything cooked by the Ladakhis is not acceptable to them. On the other hand the Ladakhis do not mind eating in a Balti house.

The Ladakhis do not seriously cultivate the practice of social boycott. For their being considerate and tolerant no instance of permanent social ostracism is reported. There are, however, other forms of punishment. A person, on violation of certain societal norms, himself feels suffocated, and voluntarily withdraws from the group. There are some who temporarily curtail their interaction with such a person. The Ladakhis are endogamous and as soon as a female marries outside the group, her affiliation to the group is ceased. If she, for instance, makes a marital union with Gara she is treated, for all purposes, as a member of Gara group. Even the destiny of her progeny is guided by the rules of Gara ethnic group. But even with all this her relations with the family of orientation are not totally sealed. She can visit her parents though the Ladakhis treat her as a member of Gara group. The Ladakhi men, in general, do not accept girls, as wives, from the groups socially lower



than them. But if someone goes in for such a union he is tolerated after the observance of Chhomo Gango ceremony. His connection with the community are severed so long as the ceremony is not observed. For some time, after a Ladakhi man marries a Gara, Mon or Beda, the members of his own group express resentment and do not like to mix with him. Dining, drinking and smoking are avoided till his union with the girl of lower category is dissolved or regularised. The man, violating the social norm, is required to visit sacred Ganges and take bath in holy water for 15-20 days. For this, he would invariably be accompanied by a Lama or some other person who would do worship for him. Then he declares for dissolution of his socially illegal union. And only then he is recognised as a regular Ladakhi. In Ladakhi social structure a person from a lower group cannot be admitted.

The Tibetan refugees who are Buddhists and have lately been colonized some nine kilometres away from Leh, on Leh-Dungti road, and a few families living near Spituk village, are not taken at par by the Ladakhis. The social inferiority of the Tibetans is explained on two counts. Firstly, they do not possess land as the Ladakhis do. Secondly, the Tibetans do not have the kind of houses possessed by the Ladakhis. Their hutments are of a very poor quality in comparison to those of the Ladakhis. Considering the Tibetans socially low the Ladakhis do not marry them. However, a few instances where the Tibetan girls became friendly with Ladakhi boys, and lately settled as their wives, could be reported. Tibetans are not invited to the village functions. But if they come of their own they are not asked to leave. The cattle of the Tibetans are not allowed to graze around the fields owned by the Ladakhis. Though belonging to the same religious faith the Tibetan refugees are segregated.

### **Change and continuity—An interpretation**

Some of the informants from lower social strata do not now seem to be relishing their traditional status quo in terms of social inequality. Their attitude is resentful to the traditional social ranking. The argument, put forward by them, is that why should they be rated low by the Bhotos when they make all their festive occasions colourful and successful (by providing music), when they worship the same gods and goddesses and visit a common monastery, when they can eat with them and participate in most of the functions organised by the village community. It is further argued that the occupation alone cannot be the sole determinant of their inferiority. That way there are Ladakhis doing carpentry, masonry and weaving, but their social status has remained unaffected. A Gara, while being extra assertive, went to the extent of telling that when Lord Buddha allows them to worship him, why the living human beings differentiate them. Lord Buddha, whom the Ladakhis consider supreme, never promoted inequality, ranking and discrimination. Even the Kushok, while preaching, takes Mon, Beda and Gara as equal to the



Ladakhis. But the real situation prevalent is different than what the ideals speak for. In spite of the fact that the role of Gara, Mon and Beda, in the life and culture of Ladakhi is quite significant, they continue to meet an inferior treatment. On many occasions the members from the socially inferior groups deplore their fate and feel as if they are under suppression, being in minority. At the same time they expressed their desire of being at par with the Ladakhi. With all Buddhistic traits in them they are treated unlike the Ladakhi Buddhists. This proves that their adoption of Buddhism has not helped them elevate their social position. The positional change could not be through as the dominated Ladakhis deprived the Gara, Mon and Beda of certain concessions, even when the later are having Buddhist way of living. Under the circumstances the numerical strength and personal convenience of Ladakhis seems to have had an edge over cultural traits. And that is why the Gara, Mon and Beda continue to be rated socially low even after their adoption of Buddhistic traits.

Like the Hindu society of village India the stratification is also a feature of Ladakhi Buddhists. In certain aspects the order of ranking resembles the caste system of village community of plain India. But some of the features, typical of caste society, are missing in the village community of Ladakh. For instance the Ladakhi, Gara Mon and Beda visit the same Gompa and join in worship. There is no bar to their dining in each other's house. Entry into each other's house is again not prohibited. Feelings of pollution and untouchability do not seem to exist. On the other hand certain traits resembling caste system do exist. Like the castes all social groups in Ladakhi villages have specific names. Also, they have occupational specialisation quite in tune with caste system. Lately, however the labour and other employment are taken up by all the needy ones irrespective of their group affiliation. Again, like the castes the Ladakhi, Gara, Mon and Beda are arranged in a social hierarchy each occupying a definite rung of social ladder. Exactly like the caste the Ladakhi, Gara, Mon and Beda maintain their respective endogamy. Under normal circumstances the various groups do not permit for intermarrying. There is, however, no recognition of clans among the Ladakhi, Gara Mon and Beda. As a matter of fact they have no clans. Quite similar to castes these groups have and usually cultivate, set norms of behaviour. And the latter regulate the intra and inter-group relations in various ways of life. In the light of features like specific name (given to each group), specific occupation, fixed position in social hierarchy and endogamy, as applicable to Ladakhi, Gara, Mon and Beda it can be inferred that they pose for a caste-like society. The trend to caste traits might be further solidified through the increasing contacts with members of the caste society. While discussing on this issue some informants came out with vague awareness of caste system. Some of them even responded that they are the Hindus and the Rajputs. Two persons reported that they are Brahmins. The latter have been



to plain India in the midst of caste society. With the increasing possibilities of their contacts with the members of caste society the Ladakhi Buddhist's vague knowledge of caste system may turn into caste reality, widening the social distance between Ladakhi, Gara Mon and Beda. Till now all the characteristics of caste system do not exist among the inhabitants of Ladakhi villages. Untouchability and some other caste prejudices are still missing.

It may simultaneously be mentioned that the changing conditions, especially the rise in economy and education, have not helped to elevate the social position of a person. His status continues to be recognised by his affiliation to a specific social group. A Gara, better placed from employment point of view, may enjoy a higher position in his office, or place of working. But in the eyes of village community he is no more than a Gara for all practical purposes. Under such a situation all norms applicable to ordinary Gara are also necessarily meant for him. The Gara of Spituk is comparatively richer than many Bhotos of the village. He owns a big and spacious house like the well-off Bhotos. Still he is treated like any other Gara of Ladakh. The traditionally defined position remains unalterable even after a person switches on to a new profession. Some of the Mons and Ladakhis do carpentry but it has not reflected on their traditional status.

The members of the village community are also classified on the basis of economic status and the professions followed. Such groupings and division cut across ethnic boundaries. One particular category may include members from different ethnic groups. Such divisions/classes do not carry more functional importance concerning the life and culture of the village community. They point more to the nomenclatural significance, fixing people with certain ways under specific categories. The village population is, thus, classed into the following divisions :

1. Tongpa
2. Lakshes
3. Chankan
4. Kuli
5. Sarkari Lhesmi

The last two of these categories have rapidly developed during the last two decades only.

Those owning houses, especially of fairly good size, and cultivable land are associated with Tongpas. They largely depend upon land produce. Majority of the Bhotos are classed in this category. But anybody else, meeting the above requirements, can also be affiliated to Tongpa category. In fact, the Tongpas are economically more prosperous than non-Tongpas. But it never means that a Gara Tongpa can be rated at par with a Ladakhi Tongpa in social position and day-to-day dealings.

The artisan families belong to the Lakshes class. Broadly the group



includes carpenters, masons, ironsmiths, weavers and musicians. A person engaged in one of these occupations, irrespective of his ethnic group affiliation, is termed as Lakshe. The technical persons themselves have no unity or organization formally or informally represented on any occasion. Knowing of Lakshes is, however, important because any of them may be needed at any moment. At village level their services are taken as essential. In comparison to an ordinary person a craftsman, for his technical skill, has a better position in the village. His professional efficiency is appreciated though his social position, as determined by his birth, remains unaltered.

The poorest class in the village is formed of the Chankans. The Chankans are beggars and landless people. They are not in possession of any technical skill. The Chankans hail mostly from the Beda group. The Bedas who do not give musical performance act as beggars. Normally, the Chankans are not sedentary. When they find that their requirements are not met with at one place they shift to the next. For their livelihood the men as well as the women go for begging. The class of Chankans is a depressed and frustrated lot. If you give them food they would work hard for you for the whole day.

The Kuli class is of recent origin. Inception of various development and other construction works in Ladakh required lot of labour force. The civil and army agencies engage labourers from the local population to carry on their works. Members from all the ethnic groups are welcome to labour jobs. The people of Ladakh call such labourers as Kuli. The labour force which the Defence has raised is very well organized at village level. From Spituk alone there are nearly one hundred labourers representing Ladakhi, Gara, Mon, Beda and Balti. Some families have spared more than one Kuli. The Kulis are well paid. The Goba is responsible for the male labour force, and a Chomo (nun) for the female labour force. During a short span of time the term Kuli has gained popularity and it does represent labour force at village level.

Like Kuli, the Sarkari Lhesmi is again not a traditional class and as originated in later years. All the regularly employed government servants, may they be in civil or in armed forces, come under this category. The members of this group are, by and large, educated and represent the elite section. In comparison to Kulis the Lhesmis are esteemed high. In addition to traditionally fixed persons the members from Lhesmi group also, at times represent the villagers as their spokesmen. The Lhesmi membership is towards increase because of the increasing formal education and employment opportunities.

Some political considerations also get reflected in the ranking of various groups at village level. The connection with higher-up positions counted for certain social formations. The position differentiation, in this context, is apparent in the intra as well as inter-group situation. Broadly speaking, four categories are distinctly marked in the village



community. These are Skutak, Tonspon or Tongpa, Ralpa or Phalpa and Ustath or Riknan.

The Skutak, in the old hierarchy, marked the nobles like Gyapo, Lonpo, Kalhon and their relations. Now that the Gyapo, Lonpo and Kalhon are no longer officially recognised, their descendants and their relations (connected through marriage and blood) associate themselves under the category of Skutak. The descendants of Kalhon (though Kalhon has no official powers now) also continue to call themselves as Kalhon. In the village the Kalhon families are known to everyone. They are economically better off than others, and are given a higher position in social hierarchy. They are, in most of the cases, the biggest land owners of the village. The rest of the villagers show great regard to them. Another characteristic of Skutak is that its members are all Buddhists. Such Buddhists are of the Ladakhi group and not the Gara, Mon or Beda. By and large the descendants of the noble families are rich. Even those who have lost their wealth continue to enjoy their social position, the Rik. In the past, and to some extent even today, the Phalpa and Riknan cultivate fields for the Skutak. They also offer them Khatak (a scarf symbolising honour) on the occasion of Losar. In return they are obliged with Chang and food.

Tonspa or Tongpa marks the group of village headmen and their family members. Right from earlier times the Gobas have been acting as the chief administrators at village level. Every Goba has one or more assistants, lately termed as the Members. Their position is also taken as supreme in their respective village section. Though inferior to Goba, a Member is also associated with the Tonspa class. There is, however, a marked difference between the Skutak and the Tonspa. The membership in the former is almost permanent and unchangeable, while in case of the latter the members keep on changing. If a Goba or his assistant cease to be in office, their affiliation to the Tonspa group is immediately broken. The replacements are then recognised as the members of Tonspa group. Another interesting feature is that a man and his family members can simultaneously belong to Skutak as well as the Tonspa class. In most of the cases the people from Skutak class alone have the privilege of enjoying the status of a Tonspa class. The Gara, Mon and Beda do not enjoy the position of Goba. In practical life, it is difficult to explain Skutak and Tonspa in terms of superiority of one over the other. It is only in certain matters that the headman, in person and not his other family members, has more say than an ordinary Skutak. This is because he is formally recognised by the government as the headman of the village community.

The Bhotos who do not have their claim of belonging to Skutak class are included in the category of Ralpa or Phalpa. These are the people whose social position is rated as slightly lower than the Skutak. But at the same time they are Ladakhis. A Kalhon family would not prefer to select a boy for marriage, from Ralpa family. Their preference would

always be for a Skutak. However, if it becomes impossible to find a boy in Skutak category, they may go in for one belonging to Ralpa. According to the local scale, the Argons and the Baltis are also grouped, along with the Ladakhis, in the Ralpa category. The Kalhon families do deny of their equality with the Argons and the Baltis. The Baltis, most of the time, resent for their positional association with Ralpa. In their own assessment they consider themselves even superior to Skutak. The real position cannot easily be determined because the Balti and the Ladakhi belong to two different religious faiths and interact only marginally.

Tonspon class is more functional because the headman and his assistants discharge certain functions in the interest of village community. Ralpa, Skutak and Ustath, in their identities as class, largely appear to be non-functional. As a matter of fact, the class classification is not much of practical utility and significance. Rather, the people belonging to lower category consider it a stigma. On the other hand the Skutak and Tonspon feel proud of the same as it shows their links to the positions of seniority and importance.

The 1911 census of Jammu and Kashmir has also explained of the divisions then existing in Buddhist population. Accordingly, the three major divisions, with fifteen subdivisions, are as under :

1. Rigzang or Tarachos or upper
  - (a) Gyalpo (Rajas)
  - (b) Kushak (Chief Lamas)
  - (c) Klon (Wazirs)
  - (d) Konpo (Managers of Raja's private affairs)
2. Mangriks or Mughami or middle class
  - (a) Lama (Priest)
  - (b) Unpo (astrologers)
  - (c) Nangsu (officers in-charge of Raja's palaces)
  - (d) Larje (Physicians)
3. Rignun or Kamin or lower class
  - (a) Beda (pipers)
  - (b) Mon (drummers)
  - (c) Gara (blacksmiths)
  - (d) Shinkhan (carpenters)
  - (e) Lamkhun (cobblers)
  - (f) Malakhwan (dancing girls and prostitutes)

It may, however be mentioned that my findings in the study of four Buddhist villages are not in full agreement with certain position and placement in the above classification. The position of a Lama, associated with Thakshos, or assessed at the level of common gentry is unheard of. All the Buddhists consider the religious positions, and the persons associated with them as higher than any other Ladakhi. Then Unpo and Lharje or Amchi is a class of specialists in the professions of astrology and medicine respec-



tively. Any Buddhist can have training and become Lharje. But at the same time every Buddhist is not equal in social position. A Lharje, coming from an inferior group, cannot be rated with Lama who is always a Ladakhi and none else. Actually the Shinkhan and Lamkhun are not very specialized classes to be distinguished, and associated with Gara, Mon and Beda. For instance, lot of Ladakhis work as carpenters but never equated with Mon, Beda or Gara. They rather continue to belong to Ladakhi group and are always treated as higher to Mon, Beda and Gara. The existence of dancing girls could not come to my notice. In Kuyul I came across two families from where two young unmarried girls had gone to stay in Leh where they earn through Chang-selling. It is further believed that a large number of the Chang-sellers, in Leh, do indulge in immoral traffic. But when these girls return back to Kuyul they would not be treated at par with Mon and Beda. Birth is a stronger determinant of group affiliation than the occupation.

## Family Lineage and Phasphun

Among Ladakhis there is a wide range of variation in the nature and pattern of family. All the inmates of a house sharing economic responsibilities and related through kinship have been considered as a family. It may be mentioned that apart from family the individual members are also, at times, referred as Nang-Chang—a term which corresponds to household as well as the family. There exist Nang-Chang composed of only husband and wife. Then there are nuclear and extended families. The later exist in various forms. Some of the Nang-Changs do not fit in the sociologically defined categories of family. They simply mark the nature of composition of the households. The nature and pattern of Ladakhi Nang-Chang are represented in the following categories.

1. Nuclear
2. Extended (three generational or more; it also include polyandrous and polygynous families)
3. Joint
4. Extended joint
5. Husband and wife (without children)
6. A widow staying alone
7. A deserted or divorced person living alone
8. A widower living alone
9. A wife and her two husbands
10. Husband, wife, daughter and her resident husband
11. Husband, wife, daughter and her resident husband and their children
12. Father, two daughters and their two resident husbands and children
13. Husband, wife and adopted son
14. Husband, wife and adopted daughter
15. Husband, wife adopted son and his wife and children
16. Husband, wife adopted daughter and her husband and children
17. Husband, wife children, including the deserted or divorced daughter
18. Husband, wife and her unmarried sister staying together.

From the above pattern of Nang-Chang, it has been made clear



that the members belonging to different Gyuts (a term corresponding to lineage) do stay together and make the constituent units of this social group. At times the extensions are quite wide. Different kinds of relatives are accommodated and they partly merge their respective identity into Nang-Chang. The least inhibitions in the relationships of various categories of people provide sufficient scope for mutual tolerance and living at a common place. The living of a single unit alone is, usually, the outcome of an abnormal circumstance. Likewise, the extension to the extent of accommodating one's daughter's husband in the family is not always the characteristic of normal living pattern. Similar is the case where the persons have been adopted. Certain special forms of Nang-Chang are, in fact, the creation of unique socio-economic necessities, compulsion and other societal demands. In normal course, the forms of Nang-Chang keep within the well defined and commonly accepted categories such as nuclear, joint, extended and extended joint. The following table speaks of Ladakhi family pattern.

Table showing the pattern of family

Sl. No.	Nature of family	Total number of families	Percentage of the total
1	Nuclear	95	31.67
2	Joint	3	1.00
3	Extended	147	49.00
4	Extended Joint	13	4.33
5	Others	42	14.00

Predominantly, the families are of extended kind followed, in order, by the nuclear ones. Nearly 14.00 % of the families belong to the category 'others' which are to be explained in their respective forms.

It may here be mentioned that the forms of Nang-Chang, already mentioned, are not the only and exclusive and rigid categories. They may change with time and situation. The compositional change, from the point of view of number of people in the group, is frequently marked. The factors governing this kind of change include birth, marriage, death, adoption, religious dedication, separation, social conflicts and compulsions, economic requirement and social obligation. Over the years, there has occurred a definite change in certain compositional aspects of Nang-Chang. Such a change is the outcome of discontinuance of a social practice involving sexual liberty. In the traditional Ladakhi society there has, till recently, been the practice of keeping an additional

husband. This husband used to be in addition to the husband, or husbands, recognised through marriage. In fact, the additional husband, not procured through marriage, was admitted in the Nang-Chang at the sweet will of the wife concerned. In this capacity, the man was known as Phorsak. The Phorsak was granted concession to enjoy sex with the woman at par with the real husband, recognised through marriage. A Phorsak was mostly rated at equal level. In some cases the position of Phorsak was even treated higher. He was brought in the family when the lady of the house felt the need of additional man for doing agriculture and other works. In the study of Nang-Chang in four villages, no Phorsak could be reported. The informants reported that the practice was abandoned long back. On the whole the number of Nang-Chang is towards increase, and so is their size. Average number of persons per Nang-Chang is now 6.02. In 1847, Cunningham found that this average was 4.147. He, however, admitted that as a very considerable number of people were absent from their homes, the true rate per house could not have been less than five persons.

Families are either patrilocal or matrilocal. From marriage perspective, the family can be classified into three categories namely monogamous, polygynous and polyandrous. There is preponderance of monogamous families, followed, in order, by polyandrous and polygynous ones. There are only three joint families in true sense of the term. But some of the characteristics of joint family do mark even the polyandrous families. For instance, the members of a polyandrous family have a common residence and jointly contribute to house economy. Of course the family property is not equally shared.

In the past the Bhotos practised male primogeniture, and hence the entire property of the family was inherited only by the eldest son. The rest of the brothers did not get anything out of it. All the brothers depended on the eldest one. In the absence of adequate means of support, they even could not afford to have individual wife. They shared the wife of the eldest brother. Therefore, the succession and inheritance of position and property by one individual helped to promote polyandrous marriages. Of course, there have been other reasons too. At the same time the system did help the family members remain united. It largely happened to be the economic compulsion that kept the family members integrated. But the social factor also had its own contribution in the matter. The eldest brother in the family, after the death of the parents, enjoyed all respect, command and authority. Lately, however, there has been a change in the authority and position of the eldest son. He is no longer the sole repository of family property and status. Under the new rules, the family property can be equally inherited by all the siblings. Since the introduction of equal share in family property the system of polyandry got adversely affected. The frequency of polyandrous unions got reduced because under the new provision every brother can economically afford to maintain an individual wife. With the new oppor-



tunities, of labour job and employment, there is growing economic independence. Under the circumstances it is increasingly felt that one can afford to maintain independent family of ones own. It has given a set-back to polyandrous families. The number of polyandrous families also declined because of the legislation against polyandrous marriages and because of the criticism of the custom by the outsiders. In a family, having daughter but no son, the property is inherited by the daughter. She, in fact, continues to live in her parental house even after her marriage. The husband is made to stay with her only. This kind of arrangement is done only when the couple fail to adopt a male child. The Ladakhi families are predominantly patrilineal.

The institutions of family and marriage are intimately connected, so much so that the structure of a family is partly regulated by marriage. For instance, a nuclear family, consisting of parents and unmarried children, does take new shape after the sons get married. The wife or the wives are the addition which further expands when the children are born out of such unions. But after this stage there is sudden disruption in the family structure. With the incoming of grand children, the grand-parents, alongwith their unmarried daughter, if any, leave the family and start living in a separate house. This separation is not forced and is rather voluntary. Most of the parents, as part of custom, keep up the practice. Such a separation normally materialises when parents get satisfied with the maturity and ability of the son to shoulder all responsibilities. Of course they render all assistance, whenever needed. Sexual privacy from parents is no criterion for such a separation. As part of tradition, the parents no longer like to remain burden on the son, who has then to look after his own wife and children. The separation is also enthused by the hard external ecological conditions under which dependence on others is not relished. The conditions demand that everyone must work hard to make the living. In this respect the kinship obligations are not very potent. Things are done and managed voluntarily. There do not exist more of expectations from others. Further, the separation of family as Khaon (A Nang-Chang formed by the separated parents) does help to avoid unpleasantness between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. When they stay away from each other chances of conflict and quarrel are minimised. The separation also proposes for sparing part of the family property to the unmarried girl or the boy in family. The provisions of Khaon and Khangchen (Khangchen is the ancestral house) help to avoid parental interference in the business of the young couple. The separation grants full liberty of behaviour and decision-making. In fact the formation of a Khaon is relic of the old custom when polyandry was most widely prevalent. With polyandry, primogeniture was the rule, and the brothers who did not join the polyandrous wedlock were left without any property to fall back upon Khaon system then provided relief. A part of the property, initially given to parents, who stayed in Khaon, was ultimately inherited by the



unmarried son who joined the parents in Khaon. However, the major part of property was, and still is retained in Khangchen. Now that the polyandrous unions are towards decline, the Khaon system has also been affected correspondingly.

Out of Khangchen and Khaon the former is still considered better. In fact Khangchen retains a major part of the ancestral property. At the same time the members need not shift. Secondly, for all practical purposes more recognition is accorded to Khangchen. Even the Gompa grants more recognition to Khangchen than Khaon. Once a year, after the harvesting is over, every family gives a part of the agriculture produce to Gompa. The families in better position donate a head-load each. But no quantity is fixed for Khaon; they may or may not give it. But from Khangchen the monastic organization must get the specific quantity. Then Chhangjot (treasurer) of Gompa has more connection with Khangchen than Khaon. The Khangchen people use him as decision-maker when all other avenues fail. His decision comes only next to Kushok. Actually the monastic right on Khangchen is more because it has a worship room which is catered by the Lamas of monastery. The Chhotkang (worship room) remains common for Khaon and Khangchen, and their members make use of it as and when desired. The separated members continue to be labelled with the name of Khangchen. At the same time, most of the important ceremonies are held only in Khangchen and not in Khaon. Because of the extra privileges given to Khangchen people, there is always maintained a close relationship between Khaon and Khangchen. When there is a death in Khaon, the dead body is brought to Khangchen and kept there for a couple of days till all the rites and rituals, connected to this incident are over. The Khangchen people make substantial contribution towards the expenses incurred on the occasion. The keeping of dead in Khangchen is an indication that primarily the person is identified with Khangchen. Khaon is only his secondary abode. Simultaneously, Khaon is not considered an appropriate place for the performance of major religious rites and ceremonies. The Khaons, in most of the cases, do not have worship room and hence these people have to depend on Khangchen. In major quarrels, either in Khangchen or Khaon the members seek mutual help, cooperation and guidance. To face a third party, in quarrel, the Khangchen and Khaon join hands. In economic life the cooperation is maintained to a great deal. Economic position of Khaon is normally not at par with Khangchen, and to meet many of their requirements they bank upon Khangchen. Storing, the property allotted to Khaon, is not sufficient to meet all their demands. On the other hand if Khangchen people need something, which can be procured by Khaon people, it is readily managed for. Most of the articles are exchanged, without making any payment for them.

Certain Khaons, especially after the death of parents, are represented only by the unmarried girl and/or boy. A Khaon of Thiksay could



be represented by two unmarried girls only. And they stayed separately even when their parents were alive. On probing into the matter, it was revealed that they stay in Khaon to watch the agriculture fields around. A Khaon assumes yet another form. Out of a joint family if one brother, alongwith his wife and children establishes a new home, the latter is also termed Khaon. These instances prove that Khaon is not necessarily an abode of the aged parents alone, and may be formed of other members. Thus, any structure, other than the one represented by ancestral and parental residence, occupied by any person, separated from the main family, is referred as Khaon. It may, however, be mentioned that the Khaons mostly include the aged parents, staying away from their married sons.

Khaon pattern of Nang-Chang does encourage Magpa practice. Magpa is the husband who joins his wife's family of orientation and their residence. Such a matrilocal arrangement gets a substantial support from Khaon. An unmarried girl from Khaon inherits, in most of the cases, the property after the death of her parents. To manage and look after her property, she is helped by her husband who joins after her marriage. In most of the cases the Khangchen property is managed and taken care of by the sons, more so after the separation of the parents. On the other hand the Magpa takes over as the chief care-taker of Khaon and its possessions. Magpa is not a big beneficiary as the Khaon property is meagre. The major part of property remains attached with Khangchen. But still the Ladakhis do not mind becoming Magpa in Khaon. Magpa practice is resorted to for Khangchen, if needed.

The family composition changes when someone is adopted. When a couple is not blessed with an issue, they prefer to adopt a male relative. On his non-availability a female can be adopted. In latter case the husband of the female would also join. Children of husband's brother or wife's brother are preferred for adoption. Adoption leads to fusion in family, while Khaon practice does cause fission.

The issueless couple are taken as unfortunate, and people feel pity on them. To avoid the unfortunate state alternatives have been provided to help the issueless couple produce children. The helpers, for the purpose, are Kushok, Lama and Chanspa (a religious person). It is believed that these agencies, with the help of their religious power, can get a woman conceived. But if such efforts too prove useless the Kushok gives a final verdict telling that the couple would never be able to have progeny. As an alternative the barren couple is permitted to adopt someone from the same ethnic group. Contracting polygynous union, in order to beget children, is not appreciated. Still some cases of polygyny are reported. As social sanction a couple can adopt a male or a female child or adult. When a girl is adopted, she continues to stay with the issueless couple even after her marriage. The husband joins her as Magpa. Such matrilocal arrangement is again socially approved. Even otherwise, the matrilocal form of residence is quite popular. In spite of all this



the preference for male adoption is always expressed. The person to be adopted is never beyond one's kinship circle. Among others who can be adopted, beyond preference, include maternal uncle's son or daughter, wife's sister's son or daughter.

There are no special ceremonies marking adoption. Looking to the possibility of sparing a child/grownup the needy ones make request to the parents of the prospective candidate. Some promise to meet the request, and the person is spared as and when desired. People prefer to adopt around the age of five to six years. The child just walks in a new home. His/Her parents are offered Chang. The adopted one is reared, educated and married by those who adopted. The adopted one had no claim on the property of his real parents. But the entire property of the adopting couple goes to him/her.

The urgency for adoption has a specific background. Under the difficult ecological conditions even the old Ladakhis, especially those of Khaon, have to struggle hard to earn their living. But even then they need someone who can render help as and when needed in the very old age. It is always desired that someone should be there to fall back upon, specially under the conditions when a couple becomes almost invalid. Such a necessity makes an issueless couple adopt someone who may provide them support. Other reasons are no less important. Normally the Ladakhis express themselves as liberal, frank and democratic people. But at the same time they are very possessive of a few things. Their attachment with the land is very deep and none would like to transfer the land to anyone whom they do not consider as their own. In order that the land, and even the other property, may go to the person of one's own choice, the adoption is resorted to. Another important desire of a Ladakhi is that his chain of descent should not only remain intact, but also continue through procreation. It is further believed that their name would continue only if the progeny is there. The house name identity does completely perish in the absence of an issue. Sentimentally the situation is intolerable to a Ladakhi. Looking to these requirements, and when the chances of procreation seem bleak the Ladakhi couple decide to adopt someone. The act ensures continuity of house name. The adopted one, in no way, is considered different from the real members of the family.

The increasing trend is towards nuclear families. Such a change in family pattern is largely because of the change in land tenure system. The shift from male primogeniture to equigeniture led to the individual ownership. This ensured economic cover not only to the individual but also to his elementary family.

### **Family identification**

Ladakhis have no clan system, nor recognise any clan name. Likewise, the lineages are not named. Even the surnames are non-existent.



Therefore indentifying families in respect of clan or lineage name is not possible. Under the circumstances the families are differentiated and identified with the help of either titles or the house names.

The identification of families in the village is done through an interesting method. The families are categorised into two groups namely, the Kaga and Aacho. These are kind of titles attached to the families. The descendants from Kalhons as well as other nobles are classed as Kaga. Kaga, as a title carries more value than the Aacho. These two categories are not applicable to Gara, Mon and Beda. Majority of the Ladakhis belong to Aacho group. Next to the practice of attaching titles with the families is the system of allotment of name to every house. These names are different for different houses. While mentioning for a particular family, its title as well as the house name are put together. For instance in Spituk, Nurbu's family has the title of Kaga and his house name is Togoche. Now whenever people refer to Nurbu's family, they say Togoche Kaga. Sometimes the name of the head of the family is also prefixed to house name to make it more clear. Such identification symbols have continued for centuries because in a family the sons inherit the same title. The house names may change only in rare circumstances, especially when sons build their separate houses and are keen to have new names from the Lama. But as a procedure the eldest brother would always keep father's house name. For generations, the descendants from specific families continue to have the same name. When a man permanently shifts to live in his wife's house, he gets governed by the house name of the latter. Family name corresponds to the house name. Any one joining a new house would inherit the name of the same.

The house names, suggested by the Lamas and the Kushok, are normally found having association with the ecological setting around, say a stream, hillock, steep, plain etc. For instance, a house near a stream would be named as Tokpopa (Tok refers to stream and popa to those who live near it). A house near the hill would be named as Takshanpa. The house names are also given on the basis of association with animals like tiger, rabbit, goat, sheep etc. A Khangchen name continues unchanged for generations. Normally the Khaons are not given new names, and they continue to be referred as Khaon of so and so, that is, its Khangchen's name. In case the Khaon is far off from Khangchen, the new name may be sought for.

In fact the house names differentiate the families and their respective members for various purposes. Such names have been incorporated in village accountant's (Patwari) records where the land ownership is shown. Even in postal correspondence, the house names are always incorporated as part of address. For men and women, only a few names are popular, and in the same village one may find many persons of the same name. For exact identification the house names are always added. As the inheritance of house names continues, no confusion marks identification of persons and families.



### Intra-family relations

The nature of the intra-family relations provides uniformity. However, the types of such relations vary from family to family, depending upon its form and composition. In some cases the parents stay away from their sons after the latter's marriage and begetting children. In a polyandrous family the eldest brother enjoys more privileges. In a nuclear family, with minor children, the parents take all decisions. In a vertically extended family, the elderly parents or grand-parents may hand over the responsibilities to one of the grown up sons, if he is considered fit for the position. But then the opinion of the aged parents is sought while taking major decisions. In spite of the fact that most of the parents stay in a different place, after the marriage of their sons, the relationship is not altogether severed. The parent can seek help from their sons. Many of the latter even cultivate the land given to the parents, and hand over all the agriculture produce to them. Their comfort is bothered for. But still the separated parents have to work hard for their existence. They keep on working even in the old age. In the matter of respect as well as consultation the grandfather, if alive, is given priority over others. This is subject to his being in position to attend to things. In his absence it comes to the father. For various matters, concerning family, the mother is not very frequently consulted. The eldest brother, in family, also enjoys more privilege in the absence of grandfather and father. In comparison to mother, the wife is said to have a better say. It is likely that such a trait originated from polyandrous system where wife's position in the family is quite sound. Essentially the position of senior male members is higher than the females. The seniormost male member is taken as head of the family if he continues to have a balanced mind and dependable memory. In certain cases the opinion is also sought from father's brother, if any. When none of them is available the matters are communicated to the maternal uncle. He, then, acts as the chief decision-maker. The family members express as much allegiance and loyalty to the maternal uncle as to the father or grand-father. The decisions are respected and carried out as suggested. Thus, the position of maternal uncle is not less important.

As part of their responsibility the parents do their best in the rearing of children. They also manage for their marriage. The parents, at the same time, expect their children to be hardworking. Those who shirk hard work are not liked. If required the Ladakhi even threatens his children. The latter is even beaten if something is stolen by him. Stealing is taken serious note of as it goes against Buddhist ethics. The relationship of siblings with the parents does not involve avoidance. Rather, it is of an easy nature and is devoid of tension. Although the relationship is marked by ease and frankness, the norms of behaviour are well laid down. These have provision for certain concessions too. The latter do not adversely reflect on their day-to-day pattern of interaction.



The parents and children are free and frank with one another and can eat and drink together. Jokes are freely cut among various members of family. This is done irrespective of age and sex. The inhibitions and impositions are rare. Even after the marriage a son's freedom is not curtailed in any way. He, alongwith his wife and children, is left to live independently. The parents retire from the main house, handing it over to the son and his family of procreation. It has further been responded that the children take more liberty with mother than the father. The latter, at times, gets harsh. The mother does not resort to physical beating unless she is cornered to do so. But the position of parents, as that of respect is always recognised and the same gets reflected in many walks of life. The parental right over the children is widely accepted. Whether a son or a daughter is to be dedicated (as Lama or Chomo) to monastery is to be decided by the father and the mother. No child even dares to violate their decision. The children are, by and large, submissive to parents without any fear of coercive means. In polyandrous family there is no formal procedure of determining paternity. In general the eldest brother in a polyandrous union is referred to as Bada Baap (elder father) by the offsprings. And all the younger brothers in the union are referred to as Chhota Baap (younger father). Every child adopts the same procedure. That means every brother, sharing a common wife, is equally responsible to every child. Without any segregation they derive equal affection from all who have shared their mother. Actually the children have more members to look after them in a polyandrous family.

The brothers, among themselves, maintain cordial and helpful relations. Even when they stay away in their respective nuclear families, they keep on helping each other whenever required. Likewise they help their sisters even when the latter get married and stay at different places. The siblings, whether male or female, enjoy, equal freedom of movement and speech. In their behaviour too, they are equally liberal. Equal treatment is meted out to the son and the daughter. This holds true even at the time of their birth. The birth ceremonies are more or less the same for the members of both the sexes.

The privileged position in family is given to certain members on the ground of their dedication to religious organization. These members are the Lama and the Chomos. For their being more religious and learned, they are kept better fed and clothed. A Lama, in the early formative stage, continues to stay in his family of orientation. At this stage he is known as Chang-Jung. But in the next stages he shifts to one of the rooms of Gompa. On the other hand a Chomo, in most of the cases, continues to throughout stay with her family members. She does not stay in Gompa, except in rare case. But the Chomos do attend to all kinds of works required to be done in the Gompa. They readily respond to the call of monastery. Because the Chomos and the Chang-Jungs opt to devote their life for the cause of religion, which provides protection



to the community, their position is always, at least in theory, taken as superior than other members of the family. The superiority is exhibited in the division of labour and other activities related to family life. Ideally, the Lama and the Chomo are never asked to do any hard work. They are preferably given some light work. The senior Lamas and Chomos are never asked to participate in the agriculture activities. In order that the religious persons may keep up their purity and sanctity they do not indulge in any activity which may tarnish their image. Ploughing for a Lama is forbidden. At the same time the religious persons are not engaged in harvesting the crops. Carrying of a sickle by the Lama and the Chomo is not approved. It is commonly believed that during the course of harvesting lot of insects and ants get killed. Such a killing is considered anti-virtuous, and hence the acts are forbidden for Lamas and Chomos. In fact they are against being offensive and killing of living things. For that matter the religious persons are never engaged for carrying compost from the pit to the fields. Broadcasting of compost is also prohibited for them. In order that the sacred persons may maintain their purity they avoid participation in certain ceremonies connected with birth, death and marriage. But they do perform worship required on all such occasions. What is tabooed is their secular participation. Thus, the religious persons are considered as well as treated as superior to other members of the family. The religious persons do show regards to the parents but the latter do not press them, as they do in case of other family members, to do the works which are not meant for the religious class as a whole. It may further be mentioned that a Lama's position is considered superior to that of a Chomo. His role, in religious matters, is more prominent. A Chomo largely confines to the house while a Lama keeps busy in worship at various places. Through this sacred relationship he is directly in touch with the village community. Beyond family, the other members of community also have a soft corner for the religious persons and treat them accordingly. Of late some change has been marked at the level of work undertaken by the Chomos. Some Chomos were seen working as labourers on the road and other construction sites. One of the senior Chomos from Spituk is even the head of women labour force from the village. The increasing economic pressure and the attraction for labour wage have made the Chomos go in for such a hard outdoor work. The parents do not object against the new trend as it adds to their income. Thus, the new economic opportunities have started affecting the traditional attitude of the people belonging to the sacred class.

The siblings, irrespective of their sex, are of equal importance and meet, more or less, similar kind of treatment at the hands of parents. Among themselves they interact freely. There are not more of inhibitions governing their relationship. When the custom of polyandry was widely prevalent the eldest brother enjoyed the most privileged position. He happened to be the repository of entire family wealth. The rest had



to look to him for almost each and everything. Lately, the frequency of polyandrous unions has declined but the hang-over of the past relationship between the eldest brother and the rest continues to exist to some extent. In polyandrous families the position of the eldest brother is still more important. But with the replacement of primogeniture by the system of equigeniture the position of the eldest brother has suffered a jolt. The increasing economic independence, more so under the new opportunities of earning, has already started shaking the dominance of the eldest brother. When the brothers separate and have independent establishment, they do not interdepend much. Their level of intimacy also declines. While living together, the siblings get most of their affairs managed by the elderly male members. The latter even help arrange marriages of the younger ones. Between brother and sister the relationship does not cease to exist even when she is married out. On most of the festive as well as sad occasions she visits the brother's house. She continues to share his sorrows and joys for almost the whole of her life. As part of kinship obligation and usage the brother does extend material help to the sister on all festive occasions attended by her. The Ladakhis, however, accept that the relationship between the brother and sister is more close and intimate till she remains in her parental house. When she gets married and goes out with the husband the relationship assumes mild form. Now that she can have equal share in ancestral property but it is never aspired for. However, a sister's intimacy with her brothers does not diminish even if her husband joins her in ancestral home after marriage. It is not considered bad if the husband stays with the brother-in-law. Some families prefer this practice as they want man-power to look after agriculture and allied activities. The man who joins through marital alliance serves the purpose. The system works well because there is no demand for avoidance at interactional level. Too much of privacy is not desired. When the brothers are staying in separate houses they do, under normal conditions, extend help and cooperation to one another. They depend on each other while in difficulty, as also on other occasions where element of kin-based reciprocity intervenes. Under the difficult terrain and imposing geographical conditions the cooperation is essentially required in various pursuits. And the persons related through blood and marriage form the chief source of help. Of course there are other sources not based on kinship.

The husband-wife relationship is marked by affection, cooperation, conflict and tolerance. The conflict is not a regular feature of their life. It assumes serious form only in some exceptional situation. This may even separate them from each other, or may lead to divorce. Normally the husband has an upper hand and more say in family matters. His assertion prevails over the rest of the family members. In most of the cases the husband enjoys his status of authority and dominance over others. His recognition is established. But if a husband's ability is not upto the mark the wife attends to most of the family requirements.



Her verdict in family matters is also accepted. Even then the husband is not to be totally ignored though the dependence on him decreases. Under such circumstances the mother's role becomes more prominent and rest of the family members bank more on her. In matters outside the family the representation of husband is more than the wife. The latter does not attend to outside calls unless her husband is unfit to do that. Headmanship and leadership are in the hands of males alone. Normally the father or the eldest son heads the family.

### **Division of labour and family**

There are no rigid rules to press upon a person to do only the specific jobs. Some division of labour does exist but it never suggests that a person cannot undertake any other role meant for other member in the family. An adult Ladakhi is usually multipurpose. But at the same time the family members are primarily assigned certain specific duties on account of diverse reasons. The role allotment has been done keeping in view age, sex, formal education, physical fitness opportunity, religious obligation, community expectation and the prevailing norms. More aged ones sit in the house and keep busy rotating the prayer wheel. Towards the later years of their life span they are more eager to achieve religious merit. It is believed that such merit is achieved with the rotation of prayer wheel. The act of rotating the prayer wheel also ensures good luck to all the family members. Members of both the sexes operate upon the prayer wheel. This job is, however, not done by all the old people, and all the time. Those who are comparatively fit go ahead with other activities which help them secure their bread and butter. Some of them tend cattle for grazing and keep busy with one or the other agricultural activity. There are others who do baby-sitting in the house when rest of the family members are engaged in other pursuits. If time permits they switch on to spinning, weaving and making of shoes, ropes, socks, etc. Shoe-making and weaving cannot be done by all the Ladakhis. But spinning is known to almost all of them. It is generally the old men and women who keep a watch over the crops. The watching of crops can be done sitting at a point near the house when the agriculture fields are adjoining. If the fields are little away they manage to go there and do the needful. Among families, not having the aged persons, the watching of crops can be done by any other member. The ploughing, sowing, carrying and broadcasting of compost, cutting of grass, harvesting of crops, preparation of bricks, construction of fencing walls, digging of water channel, bringing of drinking water, winnowing and threshing, transportation of goods by yaks and horses, are essentially the jobs of the young people. Lately a large number of them got employment on regular or casual basis. Most of these are engaged as labourers. Their participation in household and agriculture works is now subsidiary. Many of the aged ones also work as labourers. The



role of the young females is no less important, They participate in all the activities except ploughing of the fields, a specialized job meant for men only. Over and above, the household work is primarily a woman's concern. Being the chief cook of the house she spends most of her time in preparing food and Gur Gur and in serving the same to all family members. Preparation of Chang is also the arena of females. They are considered as the best hostesses for serving Chang and Gur Gur. Cleaning of utensil and the house, burning fire, serving of food etc., are all done by the females. The young daughters and the daughter-in-law are usually seen cooking food. Except when unavoidable the old ladies do not cook. When the house-wife is not well, or if she goes out to some other place for long stay the entire household work is done by the men only. It is no condition that the men would never do the women's job. In the sphere of women's activities, child rearing and fetching of water are the other essential concerns. But the men also share as and when needed. In addition to their routine household activities, the women also spend some time in spinning, weaving, knitting, sewing etc. if they happen to know the same. It has further been observed that the women work more in the agriculture fields. At ideological level the dominance of men in agriculture activities is always stressed. One can regularly see women working in the fields, and the men drinking Chang ann Gur Gur or relaxing here and there. The younger children who are not in a position to help the parents in any major work either loiter around or attend schools which have lately been opened in almost all the villages. Some of them, especially those around the age of eight-to-ten years, are asked to look after their younger brother or sister when the adult family members go out for outdoor work. The educated Ladakhis are hesitant to participate in their traditional family duties. Their contribution is less as they devote more time to the new assignment. Even otherwise they find little time to attend to other activities. Such people are those who have been absorbed in various regular services. A majority of such people leave their villages early morning and return only in the late evening. They can get a chance to participate in their traditional division of labour only on Sundays and other holidays. The families, having more manpower, do not even disturb those earning through employment. But such wage-earners are not spared from hard toil when no other manpower is available. The females, in such families, have to devote more time to agriculture activities. Some of the large families have made an adjustment with the new conditions. Depending upon the strength of the family members they spare one or more persons to go in for regular employment. The rest, whom they consider as sufficient to take care of agriculture and other requirements, stay back. By doing so they have availed of the new opportunity of employment, as also retaining the traditional source of income and division of labour.

The pattern of division of labour in the family is temporarily disturbed when the Ladakhis respond to the call of religious order. There



is reciprocity of services between the Ladakhis and their monastic organization. The Kushok and the Lamas cater to the religious needs of Ladakhis. The Ladakhi life is so religion-oriented that the people cannot do without the help of religious persons. For all major events the services of Lamas are requisitioned. And the specialists are suitably rewarded. In addition the villagers supply manpower to the monastery to carry on its secular functions. There is a set procedure defined for the purpose. The village headman deputes people, by rotation, to work for Gompa and to serve the Lamas. No one dares turn down the headman's instructions. In case of family has no man-power to spare the head of the family engages, on payment basis, the required number of people who are asked to work for Gompa. While working for Gompa, the normal labour in family gets up-set. The monastic organization is held so strong that no one dare say no to the deputation of their men or women to work for the monastery and its inmates. Many a times it sounds like forced labour in the name of religion.

Apart from their economic involvements the members in a Ladakhi family have to regularly devote some time to a religious rite observed in the worship room of the family. In the religion-dominated community of Ladakhis almost every family maintains a room, or a little space in a room, meant for keeping the idol or images or photographs of their gods and goddesses. These chiefly represent reincarnations. Some of the religious paintings are also fixed on the walls of this room. This is the best maintained room, usually having a Ladakhi carpet spread on its floor and Ladakhi tables arranged in order. A variety of utensils and other equipment are also housed there. Some of the tumblers need to be daily filled with fresh water. Other bowls are filled with grain and butter. A wick, immersed in butter, is made to burn in flame. All this is to be done every morning by an adult male or female member of the family.

### **Social boycott**

The interaction between various families is primarily governed by a common objective of maintaining solidarity. Each other's welfare is bothered for in the interest of group. The participation in various rites and ceremonies, observed by any family, is a grand affair. On occasions when more manpower is needed by a family, the others help outrightly. The unity among various families is widely observed at the time of harvesting of crops and the death feasts. Even the families, not connected by blood and marriage, have devised means to help each other. The system of Phasphuns is the most important living example of this kind. Instances of ordinary assistance are more or less regularly marked among the members of families of neighbourhood. The pattern of inter-family relationship is so designed that no family feels as if they are denied of help and cooperation of other families. Difficult environ-



mental conditions provide major background to helpful attitude and cooperation. The difficult surroundings have made living hard. No family can afford to think of self alone, in isolation of other families. If, on account of certain undesirable acts, a family is temporarily boycotted by the rest, its existence is immediately threatened. Indulgence in antisocial acts is, therefore, mostly avoided. But still there is provision for social boycott of a person/family to make the Ladakhis realise of their age-old binding and norms.

Social boycott is locally termed as Melan Chhulam. It debars one from sharing water and fire with others. Social boycott is hardly resorted to. And if at all it is done, it assumes only a temporary form. This is to avoid putting a person in difficulty. Even the temporary boycott is believed to help a great deal in the maintenance of social control. Being scared of the provision for social boycott people remain very submissive to the group interest and the norms of society. Under the hard conditions it is believed that the existence, in isolation of ones own fraternity people (posed by social boycott), would come too hard. The social boycott is thought of only in case of serious violations of religious bindings and the norms holding community integration. People may plan for social boycott.

1. when someone challenges or threatens the Kushok or Lama,
2. when one tries to indulge in party-politics against the religious heads, and
3. when one poses a threat to community life.

When anyone gets involved in the above acts the Goba and his assistants call for a meeting of the elderly men of the village. The defaulter is given a chance to express himself. And if he does not satisfy the gathering his social boycott is announced with the following provisions.

1. The Lamas stop serving the defaulter and his family. It may be mentioned that the Ladakhis are so much religion bound that they cannot do without worship. And the latter is done only by the Lamas. It is a terrible demoralisation when one is dispossessed of the religious services.
2. Nobody not even his close relatives, would visit him.
3. All kind of help and cooperation are withdrawn from the person as well as the family. Although the affected people have to manage single handed.
4. Neither the person is offered food by anyone nor his food accepted.
5. The person is denied the right of having marital alliance with any member of Ladakhi group.

Such an alienation puts the person to extremely difficult conditions which make him realise his folly. In order to revive his earlier favours

from community the pardon is not only sought from Goba and his assistants but also from the Lamas and the Kushok.

### Gyut or Rigs

Gyut is a bigger social group than the family. It refers to a group of people who trace descent from a common ancestor or ancestress. As the group is based on blood tie the entry of an outsider into the group is not permitted. The Gyuts have no specific names, but the villagers know of their respective Rigs. They are even aware of others existing in the village. In the absence of Gyut name, and in the absence of the existence of clan, there is marked no association between such social groups and the surname of the individuals. In fact the Ladakhis do not have surnames. No part of an individual's name is inherited from any member of the senior generation. From the names of the persons they cannot be identified as belonging to certain specific Gyuts. Because of having blood relationship, the members of a Gyut are not allowed to marry each other. A Rigs is always exogamous. The relationship ties with the members of Rigs group are recognised upto five or six generation. That way the group is more comparable to the lineage rather than to the clan or sept. The size of a Gyut is not fixed. It depends upon the degree or recognition of a common association to an ancestor or ancestress, as also on the bulk of surviving persons. In a family the husband belongs to a Gyut different from his wife. The children continue to inherit father's Gyut. At the same time the mother's Gyut continues to be recognised, especially for the purpose of marriage. Her son and daughter cannot be married with members of her Gyut. That way the Gyut, and not the clan, regulates marriage rules. Normally, the members of a Gyut stay in the same village, exception being those who leave the group after marriage.

Functionally the Gyut forms an important group. Its members often interact for diverse purposes. They seek each other's help and cooperation. Due recognition is accorded to Gyut relationship at the time of marriage, Losar, conflict etc. Principle of reciprocity is observed while rendering help and cooperation. On the occasion of Losar the Gyut members invite each other for food and drinks. Any marriage in the Gyut involves certain obligations on its members. As part of kinship usage, prevalent in Rigs, its adult members do offer Khataks (ceremonial scarfs) to the husband of a girl after her marriage. The newly-weds are also invited for meals and drinks. In fact the Gyut members regard any of the girl from the group as their own daughter or sister. And the above mentioned treatment is the result of this kind of consideration. A girl is given clothes by those members of Gyut with whom her relationship is further close. Likewise, the people of Gyut render help at the time of death. The Ladakhis have to arrange a few feasts after the death of a person. The chief eaters are the Lamas and



Phasphuns. The Gyut families provide help while arranging the feast. When a death occurs in the house of 'X', the 'Y', who is closely related, and is from within the Gyut, also arranges for a feast, on his own behalf, in the name of the dead. Such a feast is arranged in the dead person's house but all its expenses are incurred by one outside the family. When someone is not in a position to manage the feast for the whole day, he may share expenses for a portion of it. If no adult member is left in a family to look after the minor children, the responsibility of their bringing up falls on Gyut families. One of the families, closely related, assumes the responsibility of rearing the minor ones till they come to a position to stand on their own feet. The work is taken up as part of moral responsibility vested in Gyut. If the Gyut families are not in a position to manage, the matter is looked into by the members of Phasphun, a still wider social group. The helpless ones are, thus, not left in lurch. Even if the relationship of Gyut does not mark two families they may help each other in various walks of life. For instance they can borrow each other's bullock for ploughing, as also exchange labour help. In harvesting and other agriculture activities they render help on the basis of reciprocity. Assistance, in cash and kind, is also provided on various festive occasions, including marriage. On the other extreme some families are in conflict with one another. In that case they withdraw their mutual cooperation. The land and physical beating of an individual under intoxication form major basis of conflict.

In spite of the fact that the Gyut members are related through blood they do not necessarily belong to a common Phasphun. The families from the same Gyut may join different Phasphuns. It does not mean that no two families of a Gyut can become Phasphun to one another. From the existing network of Gyuts and Phasphuns it is clear that the factors, other than kinship, are also taken into account in the selection of Phasphuns. Rather, the kinship consideration is comparatively less important. Gyut membership is determined by birth, while Phasphun membership is voluntary and is based on the worship of a common god.

### **Phasphun and family**

The help at the time of birth, death and marriage is mutually rendered by specific families. These families, and the members thereof, are known as Phasphun of each other. It is a brotherhood pool where members are not necessarily related through blood and marriage. When the grand-parents and the parents in a family die, leaving helpless minor children, the Phasphun members come to their rescue and protection. One of the Phasphun families looks after these children and takes the responsibility of their bringing up. Some family volunteers for the job. When no one comes forward the heads of Phasphun families organise a meeting and decide as to who would do the needful. No family would disrespect the decision. It is always carried out for the sake of unity in

Phasphun. When the members of a family desire to live separately, Phasphun representatives are informed. Readily responding to the call they make impartial division of the family property. Their decisions are binding and are agreed upon without resentment.

The network of relation in Phasphun organization is, thus, of an important nature. And its members try to keep it up. The membership of Phasphun is limited. But there is no hard bound restriction to its increase or decrease in terms of strength. In general, once a family is member of a particular Phasphun it continues to be so. When an issueless couple adopts someone the adopted one also joins the same Phasphun as that of the adopting parents. He or she ceases to be a member of the earlier Phasphun. The families of Phasphun do not object to such a rearrangement. The additions are treated as regular members of the group.

Phasphun, as defined by the Ladakhis, is a social group composed of a few families whose members worship a common god and help one another on all festive and sad occasions. All the Phasphun families have common La (god) and they together worship him on the occasion of Losar. The members of such families are not necessarily connected through descent or any other kinship ties. Social group apart, the Phasphun also refers to the relationship as a Ladakhi is often heard remarking that so and so is his Phasphun. There is no definite size defined for a Phasphun group; it varies from group to group.

The composition of the Phasphun groups, as found during the course of my fieldwork, is as under.

**Table showing the size of Phasphun groups**

Sl. No.	Size of Phasphun No. of families (included)	Total number of families represented	Percentage
1.	up to 5	96	32.00
2.	6 to 10	183	61.00
3.	11 to 15	15	5.00
4.	Above 15	Nil	Nil

It may also be mentioned that three families do not belong to any Phasphun group. In this sense they live independently. The heads of the other three families informed that they do not know the number of families in their Phasphun groups. But it is obvious from the above table that the size of a Phasphun group does not exceed fifteen families. More (61.00%) of the Phasphun, however, retain a composition of six to ten families.

It may further be mentioned that a Phasphun group does not correspond to any territorial unit. At times one or two families, out



of a Phasphun group, may be related through kinship. But there is no hard and fast rule about it. Even the neighbouring families do not necessarily belong to a common Phasphun group. There are cases where two families, living in close proximity, are not connected through Phasphun relationship. Rather, the Phasphuns of the other two families are those living at distant places. Sometimes the families living in different villages are found sharing a common Phasphun group. For instance, Wangyal from Sabu has all his Phasphuns living in Shee village. And all the four Phasphun families worship Chozhanskang god of Hemis monastery. But the latter practice is reported in case of those who do not have, in the village, the families of their own ethnic group. The Gara, Mon and Beda are usually having one family each in almost every village. At the same time they are not permitted to be Phasphun to Ladakhis. Under the circumstances the Phasphuns of a Gara would be the Gara families from other villages. Similar is the position of Mon and Beda. But in case of the Ladakhis the Phasphuns are, in most of the cases, from within the village. It is always preferred that a Phasphun family does not live in some far off village.

The Phasphun group of the Ladakhis cannot, in any way, be equated to a clan group. The members of Phasphun are not necessarily connected through common descent. They can even marry each other when they are not lineally related through kinship. The Gyut members do not marry each other but there is no such bar to Phasphuns, if other things permit. Again the clan name of a man does not normally change if he joins his wife's residence after marriage. But the Phasphun of a man, among Ladakhis, would change under this circumstance. The man is immediately dissociated from his original Phasphun group and accepted as a member of his father-in-law's Phasphun group. Thus, the individuals from the Phasphun group keep on drifting, affecting the total strength of the group. Likewise the composition of a Phasphun group is again disturbed when some family leaves the Phasphun group, or if some new one joins. Leaving of a Phasphun group involves no ritual or ceremony. But for the new entrant it is necessary to worship the god owned by the Phasphun wished to be joined. The worship involves offerings of small white flags and Khatak. The occasion is also marked by the offering of Chang and Gur Gur to all the Phasphun members. All members of the Phasphun know the name and location of their common god. The image of Phasphun god is kept in a Gompa or in a house of some Phasphun family. It may also be installed on a hillock.

The religious element does play an important role in the structure and function of Phasphun group. The entire network of relationship is maintained under the fear of common god. If the prescribed pattern of duties and obligations is not observed, the Phasphun god may get indifferent and come hard on the members. The common god is also held responsible for general welfare of the Phasphun. With this background the Ladakhis cannot afford to annoy him. All the Phasphun



members, together, perform an elaborate annual worship to appease the Phasphun god. They all visit the place and make necessary offerings.

It is through the god of Phasphun that link is maintained with the wider monastic religion. He must belong either to the Red or the Yellow Sect of Buddhism. Some of the Phasphun gods from Sabu are linked with Hemis Gompa, a Red Sect monastery; and the rest to Spituk Gompa, the Yellow Sect monastery. If a bigger Gompa does not exist in near vicinity, the Phasphun god is associated with some Vihara (smaller Gompa) located at the nearest point. The association with the chief monastery is then represented through Vihara. The existence of such an arrangement points to another important characteristic of Phasphun group. The members of a Phasphun group must belong to one of the two religious sects existing in Ladakh. They do follow either the Red or the Yellow sect. In order, therefore, that the god may not get annoyed, all families show respect to their roles and duties. For instance the dead body of one of the Phasphun members is taken care of by the people of Phasphun. Till the time of cremation it remains in the custody of Phasphuns. It is only they who make the dead body arrange in sitting posture. Only a Phasphun manages for fire to cremate the dead body. Further, the Phasphuns look after the mourners as well as the Lamas. They are to be fed and extend other possible comforts. The property and other belongings of the bereaved family are also watched by the Phasphun families. One of the superstitious beliefs of the Ladakhis is that the water channels in the village should not be crossed by the spouse of the dead person for atleast one month after the death. If anybody overlooks the taboo he is bound to bring bad luck to the villagers. The channels may also dry up and cause drought and disease. In order that no channel is crossed, the person concerned, if has a house in the middle of the village, is temporarily accommodated in a Phasphun's house located on the outskirts of the village. If no such arrangement is made the person stays in a tent temporarily erected for the purpose. During the mourning period following death the household work as well as the fields, crops and animals of the bereaved family are looked after by the Phasphuns. The family concerned need not bother for such work. As in case of death the help is also rendered when the marriage takes place in one of the Phasphun families.

In spite of the involvement of social and religious obligations as part of Phasphun network there is no compulsion that no family from the group would ever leave it, or no new family would freshly be admitted. Some may leave the group, while others may join. The disintegration of a Phasphun group may occur when some member families decide to settle at some distant place. They, then, prefer to join a new Phasphun in the immediate surrounding. Thus, disintegration of one group causes strengthening of the other. The structural disruption is also caused when there brooms an inter-family conflict in Phasphun group. Thirdly, when a Phasphun group becomes unmanageable, from the point of its



numerical strength, some people voluntarily decide to back out. The feeling is that smaller the group the better is its efficiency in terms of services. Yet another trend has lately been generated. Of late the Ladakhis got divided into two political groups, namely, Congress 'A' and Congress 'B'. This happened in view of supporting their respective candidate in the formal elections of Parliament and State Assembly. This division reflected on Phasphun groups which also got divided into 'A' and 'B'. With this some members decided to leave their original Phasphun group and join one of their own political interest. The trend led to reorganisation of the Phasphun groups. This kind of process has, thus, adversely reacted to the traditional social formation. Alongwith the contraction or expansion of Phasphun groups the nature of relationship among the members also changed, more from smooth to strained ones. The new trends have caused yet another change in Phasphun organisation. This is again an outcome of the influence of new political trends. Prior to 1947, when the Kalhons used to be in power, every Ladakhi family in Kalhan's neighbourhood, village and jurisdiction, used to be regarded as his Phasphun family. All such families rendered help to Kalhon's family on festive as well as the mourning occasions. But then the Kalhon and his family members never reciprocated. This type of system started collapsing after the Kalhon's position ceased to be recognised as high in the new political set-up. This compelled the Kalhon families to have a few Phasphuns on the basis of reciprocity of services. Now the relationship is reciprocal rather than of one way, presenting a more democratic look.

Like the Phasphun relationship, characterised by help and cooperation, there is the Chhasphun relation whereunder two Ladakhis, from two different families, render assistance to one another. The Chhasphun relationship is between two individuals and not between the families as observed in case of the Phasphun. Kinship does not form the basis of Chhasphun relation. As a procedure two persons, married or unmarried, of the opposite sex and of any age decide to get into brother sister relationship. Such persons are from different families and usually not related. For similar thinking and ideas, they develop liking for each other. A stage comes when they decide to be declared as Chhasphun to each other. A worship, as prerequisite, to solidify this relationship is then performed. It is performed by the Lamas. After the worship is over, the Lamas make two knots in the name of individuals. This certifies the declaration of two as Chhasphun. The declaration does define certain obligations and usages which are to be observed by the persons concerned. They cannot marry each other nor think of indulging in sexual relationship. Ceremonial exchange of things between the two is recommended. Chhasphuns look to each other's comforts and well-being.

The Phasphun group is again vital in the classification of village

community. Member of every Phasphun group categorically classify the Ladakhis of their village into two divisions :

1. Those who eat in most of the feasts connected with birth and death.
2. Those who do not eat in all the birth and death feasts. They do so in certain specific ones.

In the first category are included the members of ones own Phasphun group plus those of the Gyut. The rest of the people are grouped under the second category. Thus if a child is born in Phasphun 'A', then all its members would join in the feast connected with the occasion. They may also be joined by the Gyut members of the family in which the birth has taken place. But the rest of the people would join only in the feast organized after the monthly worship, meant for the new born, is over. The participation of Phasphuns and the Gyut members at equal level, in the context under reference shows that the persons connected through the worship of a common god are as important as those connected through kniship. Another idea, underlined in the system, is to reduce the economic burden on the family arranging the feast. In the big network of feasts, which Ladakhis observe, if all participate all the time the burden on the host would be too much. As a relief mechanism only the closest members are made to join the feasts. In order that rest of the village community is not altogether ignored, its members are invited to participate in one birth and one death feast. In other word the large village community is given a secondary place; the first goes to ones own Phasphuns and Gyut people.



## Institution of Marriage

The process of marrying involves an interplay of kniship, religion, economy and certain other traits of Ladakhi culture. Those connected through kniship help arrange a suitable match. They also define the sphere of avoidance. The religious men pave way for clearance at various stages. Economy determines the state of marriage. The other traits contribute in other context.

For various reasons the Ladakhis consider marrying as essential. One consideration is that when the parents become old, they need additional hands to look after the family and its property. The requirement is metwith through marriage. The second consideration for marrying is to have children who maintain the line of descent. Thirdly, the people feel that marriage regularise sex relations. It is feared that there would be chaos if sex relationship is not regulated through marriage. More men are married than the women and the trend is an outcome of polyandrouns system. Sometimes the age of a husband is far less than the wife. This again is attributed to polyandry. When the eldest brother marries, the youngest brother, who has to share the same wife, may be very young in age. Because of this age-old practice the Ladakhis do not mind having wives older to them. Even in monogamous urions, the age of the wife, in most of the cases, is higher than the husband.

Among the Ladakhis the marital position is as under.

**Table showing the material position**

Sl. No.	Marital position	Number of persons		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1.	Married	401	389	790	43.74
2.	Unmarried	432	476	908	50.28
3.	Widow		50	50	2.77
4.	Widowers	39		39	2.16
5.	Deserted and divorced	7	12	19	1.05

The percentage of unmarried (50.28) is comparatively high. More of them belong to lower age-group which is not okeyed for marrying. This category also includes those who are dedicated to religion. Being Lamas and Chomos they do not marry. More of these are males.

When the boy attains marriageable age (which varies from 18 to 24 years; child marriage is avoided because under difficult conditions one may not be able to support the wife at young age), his father or guardian, with the help of other relatives, expresses the choice for a particular girl. It is preferred to select the girl from a family having reasonably good social position and some landed property. The selection of the girl is done from a family not related to the parents through any direct or indirect kinship bond. The family may be from within or outside the village. When these preconditions are not locally metwith, the Ladakhis go to far off places to select the girl. Leh people may be married as far as Zanskar, Nubra, etc. Consideration like clan exogamy is missing as there are no clans among Ladakhis. The wife's sister is a preferred mate (the only exception where already existing affinal links are ignored). Families found connected through three to four generations are avoided for marriage. Usually the families so connected correspond to Gyut which is always exogamous social group.

Before contacting the girl's parents, a religious specialist, called Onpo (astrologer), is consulted for the future prospects of the match. Onpo determines whether the Loh of the boy and the girl match or not. Loh is one of the 12 years (Piwa, Lung, Tak, Yoz, Dug, Dul, Tah, Lhuk, Speh, Chah, Khee, Phak) to which the boy belongs. His year is then compared with that of the girl. If the readings for the two are found supportive the match is approved. In many cases a written document giving terms and consent for marriage is prepared. It used to be more popular when polyandry was the chief form of marriage. Only after getting a clearace from Onpo the girl's party is approached. Boy's maternal uncle, his father or the father's brother contact the members of the girl's family. A few litres of Chang, a ring and a Khatak are carried along. The step is termed as Nhin Chang. The party members express the desire. The acceptance of Chang and Khatak approves the proposal. While putting the proposal, the boy's father request saying Zu-Zu. To start—with the value of bride-price is kept high but it is decreased to Rs. 300/- to Rs. 400/ when requested. At times the amount of bride price touches thousand. The bride-price is cleared by giving cash and articles like gold, silver, corals, turquois, clothes, goats, sheep etc. The payment can be made in instalments, even after marriage. Agreement in reagrd to bride-price and Chang is written in the presence of Goba. This is, however not sufficient becuase the proposal also needs an approval of other close relatives from both sides. As a result the members of both the parties meet again in the girls house. The boy's party supplies Chang, butter and tea to be used on the occasion. This assembly decides that the girl would be spared for marriage. In some cases a third call, accom-



panied by Chang, butter, Gur Gur, Khatak etc., is also made. On this occasion, a ring or some turquois may also be given to the girl. The bride-price, if desired, can be paid on this occasion. More the number of visits to girl's place, more the Chang they carry. Either on second or third call the Phasphuns of the girl as well as of the boy also come to participate in the ceremony. The Phasphuns and others are treated at par. The visit with Chang is sometimes termed as Chat-Chang.

According to Ladakhi custom if the girl's marriage is performed at her parental place, she is to be given more Rak-Tak (trousseau and ornaments). But if the girl shifts to her maternal uncle's house or for that matter to some other relative's house, and gets married there, the Rak-Tak value is minimised to a very large extent. The very shifting of the girl to a relative's house indicates that her father is not economically sound to afford all expenses of her marriage. With this background in view, more of Rak-Tak is not desired.

To select an auspicious day for marriage, the Onpo is again consulted. On the appointed day, the boy's father, his relatives and Phasphuns (numbering 6 to 10 persons), gather to form the marriage party. A horse is taken along the party. On the way back the bride rides on it. Only one female, of the age of bride, accompanies the marriage party. She, on back, guides the bride and helps her in various ways. The boy, who is to be married, does not join marriage party. He stays back in the house and sends his representative with the marriage party to escort the bride. The members of the marriage party are known as Nyopas. The clothes for the bride, and Chang for others are carried along. They also carry raw food material which is cooked by the bride's people and served to them. The person who is sent to escort the bride performs all the rites which the real bridegroom would have done. This practice approves that a female may be shared by a person other than the real husband. It may be that the keeping of a common wife by two to three brothers, and the practice of keeping a Phorsak might have also originated from this practice. The system of polyandry must have had some bearing to the practice of sending an escort in place of the bride-groom. If he can afford the bridegroom's father gives a full dress to every member of the marriage party. Bow and arrow are also taken along. The bride's relatives close the door when the marriage party reaches there. It is opened only when bridegroom's maternal uncle donates ten rupees.

At the bride's house the members of the marriage party dance and enjoy their stay. Simultaneously the Lamas start Yangup or Yanguk worship through the reading of sacred books meant for the occasion. After sharing the feast arranged by the bride's people, the escort is asked to place a Khatak round the head of the bride. This is done on behalf of the bridegroom. She is also asked to go with the person who has offered her Khatak. This moment assumes an emotional shape when the bride and her parents start shedding tears. She is then embraced by various relatives and friends present on the occasion. They



also pacify her by giving presents and Khataks which add to her possession. Simultaneously she is advised to keep up the norms of ideal behaviour while in husband's house. The parents give her clothes, utensils, boxes, domesticated animals etc. At the same time the bride's mother demands for a Zo-Rintho or Ome-Rin (price of milk) from the parents of the bridegroom. It is expressed that she has fed her milk to the bride and reared her, and now that the bride is taken away, her price should be paid for. Her demand is met with then and there. The amount of such compensation is, however, meagre.

Apart from the worship performed by the Lamas, the role of religion in marriage is again marked prior to the bride's departure. She enters into her Chotkang (worship room of the family) and seeks blessing, for happy married life, from gods and goddesses. It is also interpreted that the departing bride prays for the welfare and prosperity of her parents who are deprived of her services. At the same time the final permission to leave the house is always sought from the gods and goddesses of Chotkang. The bride, along with the marriage party and her father or father's sister or maternal uncle, then starts for the bridegroom's place. The time of departure is so adjusted that the bride should enter the bridegroom's village in the darkness of night. She should not enter into day time. The bride either walks down the distance, or is made to ride a pony or horse. These days they also travel by Bus or Truck, if they happen to get one on the way. The stay of marriage party in bride's house depends on the distance. They return on the same day if marriage takes place in the same village. If the distance is more, the party returns on the next day. When the marriage takes place in two families of the same village, the bride on her way to the bridegroom's house is accompanied by her parents too. But if she has to go to a different village the father alone goes with her. The father of the bride keeps on consoling her for all comforts in new house. At the same time he meets the bridegroom. It is believed that the bride, as a stranger, might bring ill-luck or misfortune if her entry is not marked by a particular ceremony. Such a ceremony is observed when the bride approaches the bridegroom's house. The ceremony is known as Zab-Luk and its performance marks the avoidance of any misfortune which the bride might have carried as a stranger. An earthen pot containing dirt, residues and leftovers of various kinds is whirled round the head of the bridegroom. This is done by a Lama who also recites hymns and murmurs something. The pot is then thrown against a stone to break it into pieces. With such a breaking, the misfortune, if any, accompanying the bride, is kept away. The breaking of pot in the first instance also marks a successful marriage. In some cases no pot is broken but some Turma, dirty things, are just thrown. This also helps scare away the ghost or evil spirit. Zab-Luk is followed by heavy consumption of Chang accompanied by brisk dancing and music.

The next important event relates to bride's relationship with the



mother-in-law. Superiority of mother-in-law's position over that of the daughter-in-law is suggested. Right in the initial stage, a bride is reminded of her subservience. Till the dance followed after Zab-Luk is over, the bride continues to sit outside the main door of the bridegroom's house. She waits for her mother-in-law to come to assure her a good treatment and protection in the new house. Directed by the mother-in-law, the bride ultimately enters into the house. She is made to sit close to the family kitchen and is later joined by the bridegroom. When the two sit together, they are blessed by the seniors for a happy and healthy life. The Lamas read sacred literature showering blessings on the couple. This worship further helps avoid ill-luck, if any, in the future of the couple. When this worship, called Lap-Zang, is over the Lamas are served food and given two to five rupees each for their service. The bride and the bridegroom are made to dine in a common container and with a common spoon. The next important role is then played by the man who escorted the bride from her home to that of the bridegroom. This signifies handing over charge of the bride to the bridegroom. And mere placing a silken gauze around the head of the bridegroom guarantees the same. This silken gauze is termed as Goras. It is only on this occasion that the nature of the marital union, as to whether it will be monogamous or polyandrous, is decided. In case the younger brother/s of the bridegroom are keen to share a common wife, they need express their consent. As part of the latter, they are made to wear one Goras each. The ceremony, in their case, is performed by the man who escorted the bride. The bride does not object to her being shared, as wife, by more than one husband because she feels that her position remains more secured with two or three husbands. The brothers who join such a wedlock cannot easily backout. Their privilege of going out as Magpas is curtailed and at the same time they cannot marry any other female without the common wife's consent. In a polyandrous wedlock the eldest brother enjoys a superior position. The rest remain subservient to him.

### Ways of acquiring mates

1. *Pakhton or Zhomson*: The procedure grants liberty to the boy and the girl concerned to decide about their union. They fall in love with each other and decide to marry. Their parents may either come into the picture at a late stage, or they may not at all be informed of the intentions and acts of the boy and the girl. At times, the maternal uncle of the boy, or the girl may be informed of the development with the expectation that he would pass on the news to the parents. If need be, the maternal uncle of the boy may call on the girl's parents with Chang and other articles of presentation. This is done to pacify their anger, if any. The carrying of Chang may be repeated if demanded. Other things are settled by offering Khataks to girl's Gyut members and



maternal uncle. This is, of course, done when the boy and girl have already started living together as husband and wife. With such a silent start of married life no bride-price is claimed. During this procedure of mate selection no ceremonies or rituals are performed. It is the simplest method of marrying. Since the decision could be independently taken by the concerned boy and the girl, the neolocal residence is resorted to.

2. *Nama Khyon*: This is the most popular way of acquiring mate in Ladakhi society. At all stage the parents of the boy and the girl intervene. The long procedure, already explained in the process of marrying, forms the major ingredient of Nama Khyon. As it is an arranged marriage, matters are made clear in advance to avoid any complication at later stage. This way of marrying, poses more bindings on the spouses concerned. It may be because things take shape with the concurrence of relatives and other community members. The chance of dissolution of such marriage is far less in comparison to Zhomson where societal pressure gets ineffective.

Nama Khyon way of acquiring mate is treated as orthodox style involving Onpo, Lama and others. The Onpo, a kind of oracle, approves of the feasibility of match; the Lamas then materialise the marriage and finally the community approves. Because of the more elaborate process and involvement of various kinds of people, both sacred and secular, the marital links are believed to remain strong. The marriage so arranged has the least scope for dissolution.

3. *Shorshom*: When a marriage does not materialise through mutual consent of the boy and the girl, for reason of resistance from parents, an alternative is provided for. The latter is also operative in a case where a boy wants to marry a particular girl, but the latter expresses her unwillingness. This alternative is Shorshom, that is, marriage through elopement. The boy manages to run away with the girl without intimating his or her parents. They go to some new place and settle down as husband and wife. For long their whereabouts are not disclosed. This kind of union may also be established between an unmarried man and a married woman, as also between a married man and an unmarried girl. However, the frequency of such alliances is negligible. Generally the Shorshom is a feature characterizing two unmarried persons of opposite sex. Like Zhomson, no ceremonies or rituals are involved in Shorshom. However, when the parents come to know about the wedlock, and if both the parties are keen, they may regularise the union by deciding upon a few things. The bride-price and marriage feasts may also be decided upon. Such regularisation may be done even after years of married life of the couple. In such an instance the marriage feast is just a token. At the same time no religious rites mark the occasion. Only the couple wear Goras and say Zu Zu to the invitees. Next day a deputation is led to the parents of abducted one to say Zu Zu and to



give them some presents. Its acceptance marks their consent. And if they reject the offer they challenge to recover the girl by force.

Some informants reported that the Ladakhis also acquire mates through exchange. A girl from family 'X' gets married to a boy of family of 'Y'. Then the family 'Y' would spare a girl for a boy of family 'X'. This is the instance of direct exchange. There is yet another kind of exchange. When there are two girls in a family 'A', and no boy, and when both of them are married to two real brothers of a different family, say 'B' one of the brothers remains Magpa in family 'A'. At the same time one girl from family 'A' goes to stay with her husband in family 'B'. The final position supports that a girl has been exchanged for a boy.

### Forms of marriage

Among Ladakhis there are a few forms of marriage. One of these is Magpa whereunder a boy after his marriage leaves his parental residence and goes to stay with the family of his wife. This is largely resorted to in the absence of male sibling to the wife. But some Magpa marriages were also recorded in families where the wives are having one or more brothers. In latter cases the Magpas (sometimes the husband who comes to live in wife's family is also referred as Magpa) joined on the condition that they would extend help in various agriculture and other activities. The Magpa marriage is, otherwise, done with the view that the daughter's husband would be helpful in looking after the property, including land and livestock. At the same time, his joining would keep up the house name. Some informants have also stated that when a couple is not blessed with a son for many years, they decide to keep a Magpa. Later on, if the son is born to the couple the Magpa continues to stay on. A Magpa is simply a caretaker as the property remains in the name of his wife. At the same time, he will have no right in his ancestral property. And even if he is divorced, he cannot claim it. If a Magpa becomes widower, without having children, he returns back to stay in his parental house.

According to customary law the daughter would be the heiress in the absence of son. Under such circumstances she selects a landless man as her husband. By virtue of her being heiress, she enjoys good position. She not only dominates her husband but can get rid of him without more of excuse. In latter case, she would be free to marry again. Anybody would like to marry her because of her being heiress. Out of 373 marriages in 300 families, 38 have been reported as of Magpa form.

Although Magpa marriages are common, the normal form of marriage is Bagma. In Bagma marriage patrilocal practice is the rule. Neolocal pattern of residence also exists among the Ladakhis. In Magpa and Bagma marriages, the parental consent is a prerequisite. These marriages are, therefore, arranged ones. But when a boy and a girl, independent of parents, take the decision of marrying each other, they

go in for a new house. However, the parents of such a couple, who start leading a married life, do come to know of the step. Sometimes the information reaches them after the couple is blessed with a child. Whatever may be the circumstance, the parents of such a couple do formally arrange, for marriage ceremonies after getting the news of couple's cohabitation. The parents' approval is accorded only after the formal celebration of marriage.

Residence apart, the forms of marriage are also decided by the number of husbands and wives. The Ladakhi marriages are primarily monogamous followed, in order of popularity, by polyandry and polygyny. Fraternal polyandry, with a maximum of three husbands, is more widely prevalent than polygyny. The latter is a rare occurrence.

A detailed account of the nature and form of marriages (out of 373 marriages) is as under.

**Table showing form and nature of marriages**

Sl. No.	Nature and form of marriage	Number of cases	Percentage
1	Monogamous	336	90.08
2	Polyandrous	29	7.77
3	Polygynous	8	2.15

The table reveals that 90.08% of the Ladakhi marriages are monogamous. The polyandrous marriages being 7.77% of the total show a declining trend. The emergence of polygyny is believed to be a later phenomenon.

### **Polyandry**

The Ladakhis have been practising fraternal polyandry. A maximum of three men could be reported sharing a common wife. In the past, an outsider, other than the real brothers, could also join the wedlock. Such a man used to be known as Phorsak who was inducted in family by the common wife. This was mainly with the consent of the eldest husband. The man, so inducted was more favourite as he was brought by the choice of the woman herself. But in the present study of three hundred families no case of Phorsak could be reported. However, whenever it existed, it spoke of non-fraternal polyandry among the Ladakhis. Some informants have reported that a few Bedas still keep up the Phorsak practice to maintain the largeness of the group. At one point of time the practice of Phorsak was prevalent among all the Ladakhi Buddhists. Now some stray cases of this kind are said to be prevailing among Gara, Mon and Beda only. It is also reported among



the Dogpas. When a married Dogpa female gets interested in someone, other than the husband, she invites him to be the additional husband, without even consulting the original husband. A Phorsak, in general, is from the same social group. But if it is arranged from a different ethnic group, the man has to change his ethnic identity as per that of the woman. A Phorsak has some claim on the property of female.

It is probably because of the continuance of Phorsak practice by Mon, Beda and Gara that their social position has been lowered down. But it may also be true that they are already being socially low, they kept up the tradition. A Phorsak may be managed to seek sexual satisfaction, to have more manpower, to keep up emotional promise through friendship and to get concieved if the earlier husband is incapable of doing that. When a man accepts to be Phorsak, he leaves his parental home and property to join at the new place. Rather, he ceases to have claim on the parental property. Phorsak can also be one who is already married. In that case he will have to leave his first wife to join the second.

According to Ladakhi customary law when the eldest brother marries, the younger ones can also share the wife as co-husbands. There is social sanction for sexual indulgence with the common wife. As recognition of their being the husbands of a common wife, the younger brother like the eldest one, are also offered Khataks at the time of marriage. But still the eldest brother has more right over the female. In his presence in the house the younger ones keep away. The same privilege is inherited by the next elder when the eldest is away. The children born of a polyandrous union call all husbands of a common wife as father, making only a distinction of elder or younger. No child is specifically marked as belonging to a particular husband. But the eldest husband is said to have more claim. In normal course the children are referred as belonging to the eldest brother. Children are treated as the property of the husbands and so are looked after jointly. What Pran Chopra observed could not be supported by any of my informants. Chopra (1964:67) stated that "complications regarding paternal relations were forestalled by wise wife by adopting an arbitrary system of her own to fix the paternity of each child. Either she decided and declared the paternity of the child before its birth or else fathered her children upon the various brothers in a series determined by her". Polyandry is more among those who are predominantly agriculturists.

In polyandrous unions the terms in respect of the position and privileges of various husbands are clearly defined. Out of all the brothers, the eldest one would be loved the most by the common wife. As all husbands are aware of the practice they do not feel jealous of the preference. She spends more time with the eldest brother. Her intimacy with him is more. The common wife is more responsive to the eldest husband. But at the same time she would also sexually and otherwise satisfy the younger husbands. At the same time, she would, under the rule, have an upper hand over them. To them she may even behave as an autho-



ritarian. So long as they share her they cannot marry any female. If one of them is keen to marry, he will have to seek her permission through the eldest brother. Such rules are respected but the avoidance too is not taken with any seriousness. For instance, if a wife starts showing more love and affection to the younger husband, the eldest one leaves. She is then left at the mercy of younger brothers.

Among the reasons, in support of polyandry, the following are more notable.

1. The inhospitable geographic conditions promote polyandrous system. As the meagre limited resource cannot sustain large population, people adopt the system as a check to population growth.

2. Again, the difficult conditions enthruse people to live jointly. Under the latter pattern they can live a healthy and happy life. Polyandry provides favourable climate to joint living and cooperation needed to earn livelihood under harsh conditions. Therefore, in order that the family members can remain united, the practice of keeping a common wife has been resorted to. The polyandrous practice restrains separation among the brothers.

3. The Ladakhis have always stressed that the women should be provided adequate protection and hence they are not to be left alone. But then the pattern of division of labour among the Ladakhis always demanded one or two men to go out with the flock of animals for longer durations. In summer they have been going to still higher altitude for grazing of animals. But for woman's protection someone is to stay back. And whosoever stay back is to be granted sex privilege. Such a system also favours polyandry.

4. Under the conditions where agriculture produce, is bare sufficient for subsistence, and the surplus is almost non-existent, the joint living through polyandrous union is preferred because the running of a common kitchen and sharing other things in common prove more economical. It is calculated that spendings in polyandrous families are less, and hence the practice.

5. Because of the undulating and rocky terrain, the cultivable patches of land are available only in the valleys. As the cultivable land holdings are small, their further fragmentation would make them, economically, still unviable. The Ladakhis believe that one way to stop fragmentation of land is to go in for polyandry. When brothers stay together in polyandrous union the land fragmentation will not be done. In the polyandrous system the brothers remain united and so the land holdings. Rather, it is looked after with greater care.

6. It has also been stated that in comparison to any other form of joint living, the living together in polyandrous family is more conducive to the maintenance of healthy intra-family relations. Because of the interest in common wife, and with the eldest brother's position as supreme, most of ways remain in order. The dependence on common wife and the eldest brother is of such an order that norms-network is always



kept intact. The deviations from the ideal norms of intra-family behaviour are rarely marked. An atmosphere of subservience and cordiality marks a polyandrous family. Loyalty to the eldest brother is prominent feature of a polyandrous family. All the above considerations promote the cause of polyandry.

7. There is yet another economic base of polyandrous practice. The Ladakhis believe that in polyandrous families the division of labour is possible in more appropriate form than in monogamous ones where the manpower lacks. More attention, thus, can be given to agriculture, animal husbandry and other works at hand. The output, in general, is believed to be better with more hands to attend. Interpretations of this kind promote polyandry.

8. Lately, the polyandry is also practised as continuity of old custom. The members of older generation persuade their sons and daughters to go in for polyandrous unions.

9. Under the traditional social system, a great importance is given to polyandrous families. Such families were, at one time given superior social status. Polyandrous unions earned appreciation from one and all. As survival of the past, some Bhotos continue to give importance to the practice. Such a support helps to keep up the system.

10. The custom of polyandry also seeks support from the feeling that it provides more freedom to women. While living in such wedlock there is no chance of their liberty being curtailed.

11. An account of the origin of polyandry among the Ladakhis also provides the reason for it. Keeping in view the holistic perspective, it can be interpreted that the polyandrous system originated out of the necessity of adaptation of human beings to the most difficult external ecological conditions. In the absence of alien source of income, the indigenous sources were not found sufficient for people's existence (Land and livestock were the chief source on which the Ladakhis could depend). Cultivable land has all through been limited. For animals, the grazing facility and fodder were again limited. At the same time there was no scope for expansion. Under the circumstances any fast rise of population could never be supported with meagre local resource. This might have made Ladakhis think of ways for curtailing fast population growth. And one of these could be the introduction of polyandry, and the other, the dedication of some boys and girls to monasteries. The latter had to lead a life of celibacy. It was calculated that if all the brothers in the family keep individual wives, they would have more children than what they could have by keeping one wife in common. But then the custom deprived many women from marrying. These surplus women could be adjusted through Chomo formation. They dedicated the life to religion and could never get married under the norms of religion. Thus, the religious institutions helped to stabilise the system of polyandry. Else the surplus females could become a problem in society. The society devised yet another method to sustain the system of polyandry. The



rules of male primogeniture was introduced. The eldest brother, in family, thus alone inherited the land and other property. The rest of the brothers had to depend upon him for their livelihood. Or they could opt to become Lamas. There was left no other avenue to act upon. Under the customary rules of Ladakhi society, one of the youngest brother had to become a Lama. The rest joined the eldest brother who assured their existence. He allowed them to share his wife and property. The economic compulsion, created out of primogeniture, made the younger brothers join the eldest brother for all these purposes.

In the above background, some informants have stated that the system of polyandry was introduced, and has been maintained in the interest of certain religious considerations. Some girls were required for Gompa to promote the cause of religion. The religion being taken as supreme among the Ladakhis, some girls had always to be spared for the purpose. Such girls were not allowed to marry. Because of diversion of a large number of girls to monastery every man could not manage to procure an independent wife. A few brothers then thought of keeping a common wife. This version, of course, is contrary to another school of thought which explains that Chomo formation was given birth to keep up the system of polyandry. However, from both the versions it is clear that the system of polyandry and the Chomo formation are inter-linked. Which of the two gave rise to the other remains a controversy. Cunningham stated that the custom of polyandry has most probably been borrowed from the polyandrous Hindu race of Himalayan Kshatriyas, among whom it has been preserved for at least 25 centuries. However, nothing of this sort was explained by the respondents.

It has been reported that polyandry is towards decline for various reasons. The government legislation against polyandry has had its own impact. With this, the supporters of polyandry had to be a bit quiet. Being law-abiding, some Ladakhis extended respectability to the legislation. The process of decline got further impetus when the law of primogeniture got a setback. The inheritance has lately been on equal basis. As such younger brothers need not necessarily depend on the land and property inherited by the eldest. They can have their own share. An anti-polyandry climax was further generated by the new avenues of economic independence. In the post-Indian independence era, there has been a rapid expansion of job opportunities in Ladakh. By now there are ample opportunities of earning for men as well as the women. The growing economic independence has adversely reacted to the practice of polyandry. Ladakhis contact with outsiders also led to the decline of polyandry. The persons who did not know of polyandry, and who got posted in Ladakh from other parts of the country, deplored and condemned the custom. The outsiders viewed Ladakhi polyandry from their own cultural background and found it outrightly immoral and disgraceful. Their view point, in this regard, was even communicated to the local population. Under the circumstances some of the



Ladakhis planned to do away with the custom. Under the influence of outsiders, they have already started speaking ill of the custom.

The rapid expansion of formal education has indirectly led to the conditions unfavourable to polyandry. When the educated Ladakhis got into regular employment, they preferred to keep their independent wives, rather than sharing a common one. At the same time some of those who got posted to distant places preferred to keep their wives with them. A common wife could not meet the new requirement. Among the educated lot there is an increasing realisation that polyandry is not a good custom and that it should be done away with. Another trend which went against polyandry and has become more prominent during the last two decades is the decline in the number of Chomos. At one time, the Chomos, in large numbers, used to stay in the Gompa campus. But lately the practice has, to a great deal, discontinued. A few of the Chomos are still associated with monasteries but they, in general, stay in their respective families. The decrease in Chomo formation could help spare more girls for marriage purpose. This encouraged the trend to monogamous marriages.

### **Polygyny**

In normal course the polygyny is discouraged. However, the elements of compulsion and coincidence give rise to the practice. For instance, when a married couple has two daughters and no son, a Magpa is managed for the eldest daughter. At times it so happens that the younger sister opts to stay on with elder one and the Magpa. The Magpa and his wife's younger sister do not get formally married but they live like husband and wife. The two sisters develop understanding and compromise in regard to a common man. They agree to divide the work and continue to share the same house. This form of cohabitation comes up when Magpa and his wife's younger sister develop liking for each other. Others do not take the relationship with any seriousness. In order that her work may be shared, the elder sister herself, at times, wants to retain her younger sister with her. And the latter is tolerated even when she develops sexual relations with the former's husband. The arrangement looks like concubine system than polygyny because the relationship is not socially and formally recognised through marriage.

A compulsion to go in for polygyny arises when the first wife proves barren. When a woman fails to bear child her husband decides to marry again. The first wife approves the proposal, and at the same time continues to stay in the same house. The second wife is procured through regular marriage recognised by the village community. In Ladakhi society, the cases of polygyny are stray because the need for child is mainly met through adoption rather than by having an additional wife. Even otherwise the Ladakhis discourage polygyny. For second marriage, if at all it is to be done, a man prefers his wife's sister. The latter's parents



express hesitation but ultimately agree when they are requested again and again. An interesting case, where a man is keeping two wives at two different places and managing both, was reported from Thiksay. The man 'X', aged about 42 and employed in Central Reserve Police was initially married to Sonam Chhoskit. From this wife he had three daughters. But while posted at Leh, he arranged for another wife, though not through regular marriage. The second wife was kept some twelve years back. Now the man attends to both the wives living at different places. With intervals of time he has arranged to stay with both.

### **Endogamy and exogamy**

The Ladakhis are endogamous within their ethnic group. They do not, under normal conditions, marry with Mon, Gara, Beda and others including the Muslim and the Hindu population around. Some cases of unions with the members of other religious groups could be reported, but such alliances have no background of any regular marriage performance. In fact polyandry paved way for freedom to women, some of whom fell to the men of other religions. Such unions are taken for granted and none attaches seriousness to them. Ghulam Ali, born of Muslim father and a Buddhist mother, and a resident of Spituk remained Muslim for about 40 years in his early life. He then had a Muslim wife. Ghulam Ali is now about 90 years old. About 50 years back he married, second time, a Ladakhi girl. This made him adopt Buddhism and change his name from Ghulam Ali to Punchok Neema. At the same time he was allotted some cultivable land on behalf of Spituk Gompa. Now his son, Anchuk, is a Buddhist and has married a Ladakhi girl from Leh. Among the Ladakhi population the existence of inter-religion marriages can be traced back to centuries. The ancient trade route through Ladakh created favourable conditions for this kind of marriages. And such marriages have always been tolerated. The Muslim always married the Ladakhi females. No case could be reported where any Muslim girl married Ladakhis. The Christian Ladakhis do not hesitate marrying non-Christian Ladakhis. For such practices, one can find, in the same family, persons belonging to different religious faiths. They share a common household. Some cases prove that even after marriage, the husband and wife continue to belong to different religion. This is attributed to Buddhism being tolerant, non-coercive and assimilative.

Lately, the incidence of marriages between the Ladakhi Buddhists and the Hindus from plain India have also been reported. It came up because of a large influx of Hindu population. Some of the Ladakhi females developed friendship with outsiders who poured in Ladakh through services. Such relations either materialised into marriage or promoted temporary marriage. In former case the non-Ladakhis brought their wives even to plain India after their tenure of stay in Ladakh was



over. But in later case, the girls were temporarily used as wives and later deserted when the husbands left Ladakh. A case of the latter kind could be reported from Spituk. Dorje Dolma of Spituk developed love affairs with an army Jawan 'X' posted around the village. Subsequently Dolma and 'X' got married. For two years they lived as husband and wife and were blessed with a daughter. She is now four years old. Then 'X' was transferred to a place outside Ladakh. He left the place without informing Dolma. She is now living in a miserable condition with her four years old child. Whereabouts of the husband are not known to her and Dolma being simple and ignorant, does not try to bother for the same. The daughter does not have typical Mongoloid features and instead resembles Dravidian stock. Some informants have stated that Dolma's husband was some South Indian. Dolma is not having any house or land of her own. She now helps Narbu in his agriculture activities. Narbu has obliged her by giving a room in his house.

Ladakhis practise endogamy as well as exogamy. Village exogamy is resorted to only when no suitable girl meeting various requirements, is available in the village. Village exogamy is also observed when a family fails to find another family of almost an equal economic standing within the village. For exogamy, no area limit is prescribed. Instances could be reported where Ladakhis have married in places as far as 200 kilometres.

Out of 373 marriages, the account of exogamous and endogamous ones is as given below.

**Table showing the instance of exogamous and endogamous marriages**

Sl. No.	Form of marriage	Number of cases	Percentage
1	Endogamous	153	41.02
2	Exogamous	220	58.98

The table reveals that the cases of exogamy are more. And hence it may be interpreted that pre-requisites for mate selection are largely not fulfilled at village level. And 58.98 % of the males had to bank upon girls from outside the village. People, thus, maintain social system requirements in spite of hostile ecological conditions.

The Gara, Mon and Beda have to mostly resort to village exogamy. This is because they have only one or two families in every village. As such it is difficult for them to find mate within the village. In their case the area for exogamy is still wider.

### **Pre and extra-marital relations**

The respondents state that there is no open sanction for pre-marital sex relations. But at the same time there do not exist more of objections

against it. Tremendous amount of freedom is enjoyed by the members of both the sexes. Instances of sex laxity are not taken up seriously. With free ways the element of privacy is not that prominent. They mix freely and cut all sorts of jokes. All can eat, drink sing and dance together. Sex has not been given a wider sanctity. Under such conditions more cases of sex laxity are heard of.

A comparatively more freedom of sex may again be attributed to polyandrous system. Polyandry apart, another strong cause which did not allow formation of more strict sex norms is related to extreme winter. The Ladakhis themselves are of the opinion that they feel less sex urge because of the extremely cold climate. Under the circumstances it was not desired to enforce strict norms of conduct in respect of sex. But in the absence of strict norms, in respect of sex, frequent cases of indulgence, outside the wedlock are heard of. Many of the unmarried Ladakhi girls secretly develop sexual intimacy with the men. And their relations get known only when they come to the surface. However, most of the cases are taken up supportively. They are finally made to materialise into marriage. Some of the girls get pregnant and beget children in the premarital stage. The concerned parents bring it to the notice of Goba, his assistants and other elderly people. The man who caused pregnancy is then produced before the council. He is either asked to marry or pay compensation in lieu of. The latter involves payment of goat, sheep and money. If the man held responsible is already married, he is asked to pay Rs. 50/- to Rs.60/- as compensation. And if somebody is keen to keep her as wife, he can do so but not through regular marriage. The girl 'X', daughter of Chhewang Ishe, and now nearly 30 years old, developed sexual relations with Ghatuk prior to her marriage. The man was already married to someone else. Consequently, the girl got concieved and gave birth to a son. She was then interrogated by Chhewang Ishe who later reported the matter to Goba. Ghatuk was asked to appear before the village council. He accepted his fatherhood but could not marry to Chhewang's daughter as he was already married. As such he was asked to give compensation which he arranged. The unmarried mother did not agree to marry someone else. She, alongwith her illegitimate son, continues to stay with her father.

It has also been reported that some women maintain extra-marital relations, though it is largely objected to. It starts from within the family under the rules of fraternal polyandry. All brothers are allowed to have sexual relations with a common female. Where a union has not been declared as polyandrous and only one, out of two or three brothers marries the other may also have access to the female for sexual gratification. The act is hardly objected to. Some women even go beyond the husband's brothers. This is most likely the aftereffect of the old practice of keeping Phorsak. The customs of fraternal polyandry and the Phorsak, so popular in the past, have had their contribution in according freedom to sex. Because of higher proportion of females, polyandry system and



dedication of girls to Gompa, some girls remain unmarried. And it is out of them that some develop sexual relations. When the cases of extra-marital relations are reported to Goba and other members of his council, they are resolved through declaring divorce, desertion or separation, depending upon the severity of case. There are other serious implications and cases come to an end quietly. But sometimes no proper arrangement is made. In Kuyul, a girl 'X' gave birth to a child even before her marriage. The man responsible failed to marry her. And now she is living alone with her child. In another case a man married a girl having an illegitimate child. The man did not mind her having a child and they both are living happily in the same house. The cases of pre and post-marital relations are generally ignored or taken leniently. On the ground of pre or extra-marital relations, no Ladakhi has ever been socially boycoted. Rather, the Ladakhis tolerate the happening. Even when a Ladakhi girl develops premarital sex relations with a Muslim and later on gets married to him, she continues to visit her parental home whenever feels like, The parents just overlook the past happening. They even render help in adverse circumstances which might crop up from premarital sex relations. The frequency of extramarital relations is comparatively less. These are normally contracted when either of the couple stays away for a long time.

As the norms in regard to sex are not very strict some religious persons also find easy to get wives. In Ladakhi society the Lama and the Chomo, under religious demand, are not allowed to marry. They are supposed to lead a life of celibacy. But Ishe Gylchan got married after staying in Tibet, as Lama, for nearly 21 years. In the latter stage, he was Lama in Spituk Gompa. At the age of about 38 he decided to marry. Ishe ceased to be a Lama from the day he got married. Now he is living with his wife and two sons. Though Ishe ceased to be a Lama he continues to have a better social status in comparison to other ordinary married Ladakhis.

### **Divorce and remarriage**

Members of both the sexes are free to divorce. No ritual is to be performed while declaring a divorce. The change of religion, by any of the spouse, provocation by someone, abusing and beating, non-industrious nature, extra-marital relations, stealing, infidelity, adultery, impotency, barrenness and inadequate protection to wife, especially for food and dress, can give rise to divorce situation. Among the Ladakhis the separation and desertion are revocable. But the divorce, in all the cases, is irrevocable. As the sex inhibitions are not many, the cases of divorce are comparatively more. As soon as the husband, or the wife develop sexual intimacy outside the wedlock, step may be taken to dissolve the union. Tsering Tashi of Bemkar section in Kuyul is a man of about 38 years of age. He can read Bodhi and can speak Hindi. He is living in



a small tent with his two Sons (one from first wife) and a 32 years old second wife. He has visited Delhi, Calcutta, Kulu, Lucknow and Kalimpong on a religious mission. Tashi was divorced by his first wife under very peculiar circumstances. Tsering's father, Sonam Dorje, lived in Sabu. Later on he shifted to Rapsu. When Tsering was 19 years of age, he was married to Rigzin Dolma of Sabu. Rigzin used to sell Chang in Leh. The couple then stayed in Leh for about 5 years. In the meantime they were blessed with a son. When the son was about 3 years old, Tashi went to Manali in search of employment, and was continuously out for about 6 months. During his absence, Dolma fell in love with Dilden, a sepoy in Ladakh Scouts, and started living in his house as his wife. Tashi, after his return, did not find his wife in the house and came to know of the development. When approached, she refused to come to Tashi and declared divorce. No assembly was requisitioned for the purpose. She handed over the son to Tashi who left Leh and came to settle in Kuyul. He then got married to Sonam Wangmo. Tashi has a two years old son from the new union. The son from the former wife continues to stay with him. All connections with the first wife have been served.

It may, however, be mentioned that in normal case of divorce, the Goba is usually approached. The case is put up before him. He tries to resolve the matter. But when he fails, he decides for compensation. If a case is not brought to Goba, and when both the parties are not interested in any move, the divorce materialises of its own without inviting attention of the community. The children, after divorce, normally stay with the father. When the divorced woman, having children, remarries, her children stay with her parent. The second husband does not normally accept them. The children, in most of the cases, are treated as the liability of the father.

Even in polyandrous union there is provision for divorce. When any of the husbands feels that he cannot pull on well in a common wedlock, he can easily back out. Likewise if a common wife does not, for various reasons, like to remain wife to any of the husbands, she can easily declare her intentions and seek divorce from that particular individual. The divorced one can remarry, if so desired. Whenever the eldest brother, in a polyandrous family, divorces his wife, he does transfer her charge to the next eldest. But in such cases there has also been granted freedom to the common wife. On being divorced by the eldest husband, she may or may not like to remain as the wife of the younger one. If keen, she can easily say good-bye to them. It is not an obligation that she must stay as the wife of the younger brother. The informants from Spituk have cited a case in this context. Norbu's daughter 'X' was married to a Bhoto engineer, a resident of Leh. It was a polyandrous marriage because two younger brothers of engineer also joined the union as husbands of 'X'. Norbu's daughter is uneducated but could be married to the engineer because of her rich family. From this polyandrous union, 'X' got two kids. But then the engineer decided to divorce 'X',



and pass her on to his younger brother, who was already a husband and was uneducated. The engineer left 'X' because she could not meet the requirement to his status. He also realised that being an engineer he could get a better and educated wife. The wife 'X' did not appreciate the step taken by her engineer husband. She expressed her intention of not staying, as wife, with the younger brothers of the engineer. Leaving all she came to live with her parents, alongwith her two children.

When a person is divorced the arrangement for compensation, as decided by the Goba and others, is made. In the past when a husband was divorced he was normally given a horse as compensation. But when a wife was divorced she was given a cow. Lately, the Thuskang (compensation) value is mostly assessed in cash rather than in kind. In most of the cases the compensation value ranges from Rs. 300/- to Rs. 500/-. Some of the informants have reported that the amount of compensation can be as high as Rs. 1000/-. The frequency of divorce cases has declined because of the increasing value of Thuskang. In case a couple has children and then the wife is divorced, she is given a nominal compensation. It is normally less than half of what it could have been prior to her becoming a mother. This is because the children stay back with the father who rears them. No Thuskang is given to either of the couple when they declare divorce with mutual consent. When one of the married partners quietly leaves the wedlock and starts living with someone else, he or she has to compensate. This happens provided the whereabouts of the person are known.

Remarriage in case of widows is permitted. The practice of levirate is existing among the Ladakhis. It is reported in junior as well as the senior levirate forms. The system has its root in polyandry. On the death of first husband, in a polyandrous union, the widow is automatically inherited by the next one, without involving any ceremony. But she has been given a choice. If she is not keen to remain as a wife to other brothers, or if younger brothers are not keen to keep her as wife, she does stay on in family but not as wife. Shrub-Zhing, a piece of land for her maintenance, is separated in her name. A widow can go for Magpa as well as Bagma forms of marriage. But in more of the cases, it is Magpa form. As the widow inherits her deceased husband's property, the new husband joins and takes charge of it. When a widow goes for Bagma marriage, she discontinues her claim on the property of her deceased husband. The latter's brothers distribute it among themselves. There is thus, full recognition to widow marriage, and her unchastity does not become a bar in it. In most of the cases of remarriage the consent of the relatives of deceased husband is sought. The treatment given to a widow, without children, is slightly different. An issueless widow does not normally stay in her husband's house. Rather, she goes back to live with her parents. The Rak-Tak, given in her marriage, is also carried along. She can then, remarry to someone. But such a marriage is simple, devoid of any dance. A widow, with children, does not return

to her parents. She may not even remarry, and stay as such. Or, she can also marry, if so desired, to any of the deceased husband's brothers.



## Status of Woman

The Ladakhi women enjoy a great deal of freedom. The constraints on social liberty do not appear to be suppressive. The social participation of a woman does not pose for any significant social disability. Disqualifications on the basis of femininity do not mark the scene of social participation. Women are not secluded, they have no Purdah (veiling of face) and freely consume Chang and Gur Gur in the company of menfolk. Men and women dance together. Kinship prescriptions do not debar them. No disparity marks the celebration of male and female births. The rites and ceremonies are almost common to both. Members from both the sexes can be adopted, though people prefer to adopt a male.

The institution of polyandry helped pave way to woman's freedom. The Ladakhis did support polyandry and its utility. Because of the custom of polyandry a woman was never under-rated. But at the same time the surplus females (those who could not marry for reasons of polyandry), and especially those who could not be given protection by the Gompas, chose to either marry the outsiders (especially the Muslims) or adopted Chang-selling and immoral practice, as their profession. For latter business some even went outside Ladakh. In this context a case from Kuyul is worth mentioning. At the age of twenty a female 'X' got into immoral traffic. At the same time she started selling woollen socks and pull-overs. The 'X' led this kind of life for over eighteen years staying at Delhi, Lucknow, Simla, Gauhati, Banaras and Nepal. During the course of her transactions and encounters 'X' picked up Hindi, Assamese and Gorkhale in addition to Bodhi, her mother-tongue. Lately, she has returned back to Kuyul. She lives in a tent adjoining to her brother's permanent and double-storeyed house. Now Chang-selling is her main occupation. She entertains Ladakhis as well as the non-Ladakhis. Because of her stay outside Ladakh, she has picked up some etiquettes suiting to outsiders. Her living is neat and clean. She wears wrist watch and good clothes. Her belongings are not many but whatever she has is of a superior quality, resembling that used by urban dwellers of plain India. Besides golden bangles, cosmetics are her prized possessions. Her world-view and understanding are better than other Ladakhis around. With high aspirations she comes forward with bundle of demands when persons in position happen to meet her. But still the Ladakhis of Kuyul have no regard for 'X'. She

is looked down upon and is assigned a lower status in comparison to other females. Such a rating is attributed to her past history as well as present indulgence.

In the family a woman enjoys a privileged position. The family and kinship usages do not burden her with extra taboos and impositions. She has, more or less, those restrictions which are applicable to men too. In inter-personal relations in the intra-family situation, the role sphere of woman is almost at par with the man. That the woman is segregated on the basis of her being unclean or polluted does not hold true. In the arena of competence the woman is not considered inferior to man. Apart from her being physically strong she is also considered intelligent. The Ladakhis depend upon the woman for her capacity and capability as manager of the house. The woman's place in family is important, and it is more so in case of a polyandrous family. Most of the family interests, in case of the latter, revolve around her. Her position in polyandrous family is not only more secured but prominent too. She commands more respect and her will prevails upon the co-husbands. The junior husbands are, as a matter of fact, totally submissive to her, as also to the eldest husband of the common wife. A wife's influence is much augmented under the polyandrous system. In polyandrous living the wife's position is that of a master in the house.

In addition to the custom of polyandry the religion has had its own contribution in elevating the woman's status. Ladakhi Buddhism has, at no stage, debarred the woman's participation in various rituals and ceremonies. The woman have also been admitted in the religious order. Their placement, equivalent to Lama, in religious order is approved by the religion. The underlying argument is that Lord Buddha permitted females in the religious order. Chomo formation is prevalent since time immemorial. The hierarchy of Chomos as in case of Lamas, is defined. Members of both the sexes are permitted to dedicate their life to Gompa. But then the Chomo cannot become a Kushok. The position of Kushok is always reserved for man only. There are Chomos with high positions. But they do not enjoy the same powers as their counterpart, the Lamas, do. Religious affairs are largely managed by the Lamas, though the women can participate in the same. Reading of sacred literature, an integral part of Ladakhi style of worship, is mostly done by the Lamas. The higher status of Chomo is recognised but then its display in day-to-day life is at a lesser scale, specially when compared to Lamas. However, in the sphere of religious service there is not much of disparity between, the Lamas and the Chomos. The Chomos make all sorts of offerings in Gompa as well as Chotkang. They can touch the things and replace the offerings. Some of the services are more specifically marked for women. For instance Nagan-Nes (Nyam-Ne) and Nyung-Nes (Nyung-Ne) are the services rendered on the auspicious days, that is, on 8th, 15th and last day of each month. These services mainly involve women-folk whether they are Chomos or not. In course of Nagan-Nes, the



woman takes only one meal a day. But during Nyung-Nes she keeps complete fast. The women attend the monastic fairs and see the dances. They can observe archery competition but they do not compete for the same. Polo is played only by the men. Except in religious dances, the women can, on equal basis, participate with men in dancing and singing.

In spite of a substantial functional contribution of the woman, and a considerable amount of freedom given to her, a woman, in general, is considered as inferior to man. Some have explained a specific background in support. Men can go to far off places in connection with employment and other opportunities. But the mobility of woman is restrained. Except in exceptional circumstances the women do not, alone, go to far off places in search of employment or labour. Their mobility beyond Ladakh is rarely observed. However, they keep on coming to Leh, the headquarter of Ladakh. But the men have been going beyond the frontiers of Ladakh since onldn times when communication was so difficult in the hostile climatic region. However, the argument seems to be controversial when the position of woman is assessed in terms of work-input of male and female. All admit that the women are more hard working, and their contribution in various economic pursuits is far greater than the men. Most of the time she is busy here and there. But in spite of all this she is rated inferior. Under such explanations it appears that woman's inferiority has become a matter of tradition. Division of labour has least say in it.

The Ladakhis, in general, express love and affection for womanhood. Physical beating of a woman is unheard of. Respect is shown to the woman. Man and woman have equal right to divorce. The woman has a right to divorce the husband when she does not get proper attention and protection from him. The latter pertain to economic and social life. She is at liberty to divorce when finds her husband interested in some other female. A woman, when divorced, can claim for compensation to the tune decided by the local leaders. Freedom for marrying is equally granted to the members of both the sexes. The girl is free to express her liking. But in practice the girl's opinion, in general, is not obtained at the time of marriage. Largely the parents take the decision. A widow is permitted to marry. Now the growing trend is for love marriages. Many of the girls and the boys themselves decide to marry. Concessions for remarrying are the same for the members of male and female sex. Even then the women are said to be inferior to men, though the role and interactional patterns of Ladakhi social structure do not, most of the time, support the same. In addition to social inferiority, the woman is also treated physically weak in comparison to man.

In certain situations the female's inferiority is reflected with marked prominence. This specially applies to taboos and impositions related to a widow. At the same time such restrictions are not applicable to a widower. In addition to her being considered unfortunate, a widow is not permitted to participate in certain functions where other men and



women can. In receptions accorded to marriage party and the Lamas (especially Kushok and other senior Lamas), the widows are debarred from joining. Their presence is considered inauspicious. But in day-to-day life the widows are not looked down upon.

### **Woman, economy and social control**

The preference in the matter of inheritance goes to the male. But then the women also have some privilege in the matter. In the absence of a son, in family, the eldest or even next daughter would inherit the property including land, house and mother's ornaments. Traditionally, male primogeniture has been the rule. But in the absence of a son the female primogeniture could also be resorted to. In normal course the property goes to the men. The widow can also get a share of her late husband's property, especially when she opts to live separately. In general, a divorcee is not entitled to inherit the property of her husband. She can only demand some compensation and leave the house.

Because of the difficult physical conditions and limited working season the male and female, in Ladakh, have to work hard for their existence. The women make equal, if not more, contribution in agriculture fields and as labourer. The women are seen working in the agriculture fields and in road construction almost on equal footing, if not more, with men. This is in addition to their household duties including spinning and weaving. Except in ploughing, which is done by the men alone, the women make more contribution in rest of the agriculture operations. In sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, irrigation, collection and carrying of bundles of produce, the women's hand is, in fact, more. The women are frequently seen working on all construction sites. They carry heavy weight on their backs. Cooking and cleaning jobs in the house are primarily done by the women. In rest of the activities men also participate. Sharing in household work has lately been affected. The man's contribution has declined because of his absorption in employment at far off places. A woman is not independent for major spendings. It is man's sphere and she may or may not be consulted. Sons as well as the daughters enjoy sufficient liberty in respect of their behaviour to the elders, equals and juniors. Even the daughter-in-law is not restrained much.

In the traditional mechanism of social control the woman has hardly been given any place. Neither at village nor at wider levels the woman's involvement in the structure and role of social control agencies is reported. A woman Goba is unheard of. This position has always been occupied by the members of male sex alone. Likewise the members who, along with Goba, constitute the village council are always the males. The membership of village council and the various titles associate with it have, since time immemorial, been the privilege of men only. The Ladakhis express their doubts about the competence of women in resol-



ving disputes, more so at the level of village community. No one, it is responded, would carry out the decision given by the women. The women are said to be having no endurance and taste for the jobs performed by Goba and Members. Even the religious women are not included in the village council. When a meeting of the village council is convened, the women can watch the proceedings, if they so desire. They, are however, not invited unless involved in some cases. Whatever is decided and agreed upon by the men, their women-folk accept it. The formal system of panchayati Raj is yet to be introduced among the Ladakhis. Such an introduction might encourage the Ladakhi women to compete for certain positions in the statutory bodies.

Though the conservative feeling that the women should not go for formal education is being eroded, the proportion of educated women in comparison to men is very low. Tsewang Dolma (1969), a Ladakhi girl student of Women's College, Srinagar, has rightly stated that the Ladakhi women have been rather fortunate in the past as well as in the present, in the sense that they have never been discriminated by their men-folk in the social and cultural spheres. They have enjoyed more freedom and privileges in the social and cultural life of Ladakh. The only discrimination, rather neglect of women, was in the field of education. Girls were never encouraged for higher studies till recently. So they remained uneducated but this practice is disappearing. Now girls are taking up education in large numbers and the number of college-going girls is increasing day by day. With increasing education the change in outlook has also been marked. The Ladakhi women favour employment. There is no inhibition that the women should not serve. Some women are now regularly employed as teachers, nurses, peons and labourers. There are now increased labour and employment opportunities which the women are availing of. But most of the women still stick to agriculture operations, more because a large number of men are now in services. Supported by their traditional freedom as well as the ensuing formal education, some of the Ladakhi women have started active participation in the formal functions having late origin. If need be some of them come to the stage to deliver speech. The impetus is provided by the menfolk who manage the show. The Ladakhi women also participate in Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations at Leh. Many women visit Leh to see the cinemas.

## Birht Rites and Ceremonies

The difficult living conditions and limited resource do not curtail the keenness of Ladakhis for children. A Rapshat (barren female) is considered unfortunate. While expressing pity on fate people do not under-estimate her social position. The married woman eagerly awaits pregnancy. In case of an unusual delay the Lama, Chanspa and even Kushok are approached to seek religious favour in the matter. It is believed that the religious men can help cause pregnancy. This is possible with the help of the supernatural powers. But at times the latter fail to do the needful. The Kushok usually suggests to prepare a Thanka (a religious painting). The person concerned approaches the Spon, an expert, and gets it made. Chanspa, a religious specialist, is believed to be the chief figure who can oblige a barren woman. The issueless couple approach Chanspa and put their problem before him. The Chanspa, after making his consultations, suggests for worship in various Gompas. The needy husband and wife respond to the call. During the process, especially while moving from Gompa to Gompa, they are offered food and Gur Gur by the villagers where these Gompas are situated. In this context, a case from Spituk is rather interesting. Sharup and his wife Tashi Chhamo did not get a child for many years after marriage. They consulted a Chanspa, named Thankshar, of Spituk village. The couple was directed to perform worship in all the Gompas located between Spituk and Timasgaon. Accordingly, the woman and her husband did it. They went from Gompa to Gompa offering Khatak and money accompanied with the lighting of sacred lamps. After a few months of the performance the woman got conceived and consequently gave birth to a son.

During the course of exercise suggested by the religious persons the couple also make human figures out of Sattu (barely or buck wheat flour). The belief is that if the figure resembles a male, the woman would be blessed with son. And if the figure resembles female, a daughter would be born. The complete exercise done by the issueless husband and wife is termed Nas Jal—Chhas Jal.

Yet another method of seeking conception is through the worship of Dolma a goddess. The latter is believed to govern the woman and her fertility. As part of this worship the Lamas are invited to the house of issueless couple. They worship Dolma through the reading of sacred



literature. Only a particular portion of the sacred literature is fixed for the purpose, and the same is read again and again. The reading is to be done one hundred times. It has been told that this worship continues for a year. In some cases the Lama, performing the worship, stays in the house of issueless couple all the year round. He does not go to Gompa. For his service, the Lama is given a full dress, good food and about two to three hundred rupces at the end of worship. Dolma is then believed to help though it is not guaranteed.

The above explanations support that the children are considered as the blessings of god. And that the fertility and sterility are in the hands of supernaturals. A woman gets conceived and gives birth to a child only when the concerned god and goddess are happy with her. However, the role of husband is not ruled out in the matter.

### Detection and Taboo

The state of pregnancy is confirmed when the menses stop. In addition to the above the pregnancy is also detected when the woman concerned suffers from loss of appetite. At the same time the woman is believed to develop vomiting feeling. In due course the bulging stomach confirms what was anticipated. In spite of the fact that the religious cause for conception is held high, there are not many rites and ceremonies connected to the period when a woman carries. A few taboos are, however, reported. The pregnant woman is directed not to carry heavy load. Even in normal course the Ladakhis do not carry very heavy load because of the adverse consequences of high altitude and scarcity of oxygen. A pregnant woman is asked to avoid major jerks and jumps. One of the chief taboos during the course of pregnancy is that no Khatak, already kept in the house, is to be offered to anyone. In case it is essential to offer Khatak, it is to be procured from the market. No old Khatak is to be used for the purpose. Usually the offering of Khatak is avoided when some woman is pregnant in the house. Also, the pregnant woman is not supposed to visit other villages. It is feared that evil eye would adversely affect the woman as well as the child inside the womb. At the same time the pregnant woman is not to indulge in sexual intercourse. Such an indulgence is believed to harm the child. The violation of above mentioned prohibitions is likely to cause miscarriage. In addition, the climatic factor is considered no less important a cause of abortion. Some informants admit that extreme winter is a prominent cause of abortion.

In the seventh month of pregnancy a ceremony involving reading of sacred literature and worship is performed by the Lama. It is known as Dhunuche. The chief function of this ceremony is to read the future of the expected child. If everything is found to the satisfaction, the ceremony is closed. In case some discrepancies are marked, the ceremony is extended. Lama, in that case switches over to the next connected

worship for two to five days. The performance helps prevail upon the evil stars in the child's future. For all his services, the Lama gets his meals and two to three rupees.

### **Delivery and after**

With the start of labour pains the woman is given sufficient quantity of Gur Gur. Ladakhis believe that such an intake helps cause quick and easy delivery. In the event of some complications in delivery, a Lama is immediately called for. He mixes some butter with his saliva and makes the delivering lady swallow it. When this ritual fails to cause any relief, the Amchi (local medicineman) is contacted. He helps through his medicines. The woman delivers the child on a piece of cloth spread on the floor. Some informants from Sabu stated that when a woman is about to give birth to a child, she is shifted to some shelter away from her residence. Such a shifting is done only if the residence of the expectant mother is surrounded by some perennial water channel used as drinking water or irrigation source. If she gives birth in her residence, she and her husband would not be able to move out of her house for a month. This is because the crossing of water channels is taboo for a month. Crossing of channels would be annoying the spirits who may cause scarcity of water and damage the crops. To avoid such a situation, the woman, alongwith her husband, shift to the house of one of their Phasphuns. Its location should be at a place where the water channels are not be crossed. If such a residence is not easily available, a tent is erected for the purpose. The woman, her husband and the newborn stay there temporarily and finally shift to their residence.

It has also been reported that the husband and wife, when the latter is to deliver a child, are confined to one room, sometimes for nearly a month. They are looked after well. The Ladakhis of Kuyul have, reported that the delivery of a woman is primarily attended by her husband. He helps his wife to deliver the child. In the absence of husband, his mother, sister or any other experienced lady of the locality attends. But in Spituk the informants have stated that the husband does not attend the wife at the time of delivery. Rather, the mother of the husband, or of the wife attends. But at the same time it is commonly agreed upon that the husband does stay with the delivered woman for atleast seven days. He cannot move out of the house and looks after the mother and the infant. Such a confinement of the husband is known as Pakzam or Pankh. It has a religious background. The belief is that Lhato (a god) would get annoyed if the husband moves out during this period. And his annoyance would cause harm not only to the husband but also to other members of the community. The fear makes even the community members take notice of the fact that the husband of the delivered woman keeps inside the house for seven days after delivery.

The post-delivery period is treated as unclean, and so are treated the



mother, the child and the husband. Pollution period is for seven days after delivery. During this period no worship is to be performed. In this regard some flexibility, on the basis of sex, is marked. No worship is done for seven days in case of the birth of a female child. But when a boy is born the worship may be arranged on the third day. Because of the period of pollution, people avoid eating or drinking in the house of the new-born. The prohibition is observed for seven days. The food given to a delivered mother is Thuppa (a preparation of Sattu and meat). Thuppa is the richest food of Ladakhis. For how long she can eat it would depend upon the economic position of the family. She is also fed with butter. The child depends on breast-feeding.

### Ceremonies after birth

On the seventh day after confinement of the husband and wife, a Lama is requisitioned for performing Laf-Tsang/Dhunsung. This is a worship meant to remove the unclean atmosphere. It is after the performance of Laf-Tsang that the husband starts coming out of the house. The relatives and some other members of the village community attend Dun, a festive occasion celebrated after Laf-Tsang. The occasion is celebrated with pomp and show in case of the first delivery. The Beda and Mon musicians grace the occasion. In subsequent deliveries the celebrations are cut short. On the occasion of Dun all the invitees come well-dressed. They congratulate the parents and shower blessings on the newborn. The relatives of the couple, blessed with the child bring some dresses for the new-born. They also carry Thuppa, Chang, Roti etc. for the couple. Dun participation is on reciprocal basis. All the invitees are served with Chang and Gur Gur. After the feast of Dun the mother is allowed to move out of the house. She also takes bath on the occasion. A common belief is that Lhato gets annoyed if the unclean ones move around. In case of a polyandrous union the eldest husband is supposed to stay with the common wife after delivery.

Da-Tsang is the next ceremony observed after one month of the delivery. Its celebration also involves worship done by the Lamas. The chief significance of Da-Tsang is to revive complete purity in the house. After this worship, it is believed, the house would be as pure as it used to be prior to the delivery. Also, the performance helps appease Khimla (a god). Through this performance the Ladakhis seek blessings as well as pardon from Khimla. The belief is that the avoidance of Da-Tsang would cause trouble to the inmates of the house. In Da-Tsang too the relatives and other members of the community come to participate. The relatives bring dresses, Chang and other food material. Da-Tsang celebration is more elaborate in case of the first child. The feast organised immediately after Da-Tsang is called Dang-Gang. Laf-Tsang and Da-Tsang worship are largely done by one Lama.

The observance of Laf-Tsang and Da-Tsang indicate that the Ladakhis



give more importance to the first child. May be that it has something to do with their traditional system of primogeniture. After the purification of the house, and more likely after Laf-Tsang, the Ladakhis celebrate the birth of the child. This celebration is known as Nang-Dun. The relatives and others, including Phasphuns attend and share the feast popularly known as Marzan. Chang and Gur Gur also form part of Marzan. Nang-Dun celebration may be organized when the child is one month old. Some of the Ladakhis, specially in Leh manage for Chonga a feast organized after 15th day of delivery. It is more popular in Leh. Its function is the same as that of Nang-Dun but organised in a more elaborate form. Role of religion is important in the context of a birth. In addition to what has been explained above the Onpo's recognition is undisputed. The Onpo in general is contacted after every birth. He is rather invited to the house of the new-born to read the future of the child. He prepares horoscope for the infant. This document is believed to contain all about the infant's future. In case of hurdles reported for future life the Onpo suggests remedies. A common one of these is to suggest for religious paintings. These are to be prepared by Spon and kept in the Chotkang. As remedy the performance of worship is also suggested. It is done by the Lamas. The Ladakhis believe that the destiny of man involves certain untoward incidents and the same can be avoided or atleast minimised with the help of religion and religious agencies. A worship is again organised by the Lamas for the long life of new-born, A spoonful of milk is given to the child with the repetition of the word Om. The father fixes an arrow in wheat or Grim heap and keeps it so for a week. Some butter is applied to the arrow-tip and a Khatak tied on it.

Pangri is the biggest celebration after the birth in a family. However, this celebration is not part and parcel of every birth. Only the rich families can afford to organise Pangri. It involves the organisation of a grand feast. There is no fixed day for the occasion and it can be arranged on any day after the monthly Puja is over. The Ladakhis have informed that Pangri is the only celebration after a birth wherein people are invited. Otherwise, knowing the date of a particular ritual or ceremony they themselves come to participate. And this is almost obligatory to them. Even if a person fails to attend a ceremony on the fixed day he or she may call on the parents of the new-born on the next or some other day and repeat whatever he was expected to do on the fixed day of celebration. The unique feature of Pangri is that it is a specially arranged feast whose day/date is not traditionally fixed. Since the organization of Pangri incurs heavy expenditure it is getting out of fashion. Many Ladakhis do not, now, approve of it for economic reason and changing outlook. Some feel that heavy investment in an affair like Pangri is unwise. Pangri has no religious background. It only expresses happiness over the new addition in family.

The social position of a family bears intimate relationship with the



way the ceremonial performances are arranged. In case of socially superior families, the ceremonies are observed with greater pomp and show. They invite more people and hence spend more. The procedure demands that higher the social standing more is to be invested on such occasions. For instance, when the birth rituals and ceremonies are observed by a Kalhon, more people would come to join, more Lamas would participate and it will be for more number of days (depending upon the nature of celebration). It would also involve giving more money to Lamas.

The organization of feasts at various stages mark some functional uniformity. These are an expression of happiness and joy. In addition to rejoicings the performances call for a social gathering of relatives who get into kinship usages and obligations on such occasions. Kinship reciprocity is also displayed. The third function poses for a strong sense of community living.

Ralchang corresponds to Mundan ceremony so often reported in various communities of plain India. It marks the occasion when the new-born is given first ceremonial hair-cut. Ralchang ceremony is observed only in case of the boy. There is no time fixed for the purpose. Gradually it is organised when a child is between one to two years of age. For an auspicious day the Ladakhis consult a Lama. This is followed by extending invitations to all the relatives. The members of the Phasphun group are also invited. The hair-cut is given either by the mother or father. The hair-cut may also be given by a person whose parents are alive and who is married. They do not have professional barbers. The relatives watch the hair-cut and offer Khatak and money to the child. The latter amount does not exceed a rupee. Each relative is obliged to give it. Thereafter, they join the feast organised on the occasion. Chang forms the chief content of the feast. Ritually, only a small portion of the hair is cut, and the head is not completely shaved.

Naming of the new-born is always done by the religious men. The Lamas as well as the Kushok name a child. Labha, again a religious person, is also consulted for giving a suitable name. For name giving, Labha is more popular in Kuyul, though the specialist stays only in Fuckche. No date or time is fixed for the purpose. The step for naming a child can be taken up as and when found convenient. Normally, people prefer to seek for a name when the child is two to three months old. But some of the Ladakhis do not bother to ask for name for two to three years. Till then they just call a female child as Digmo and male as Digpa. When the parents approach Labha for seeking a name for the new-born, the Labha consults the sacred books, shivers for a while and then shouts a name. The ritual assures that the name has been desired by god. Labha is offered food, Chang and money. If a couple approaches head Lama (it happens more in case of socially superior families) to seek name for the child, they first offer a Khatak to head Lama and then humbly put their proposal. Khatak for a head Lama is the

chief symbol of respect and honour. Some also offer money. In case of well-off and socially superior families, the occasion of naming is celebrated with a feast. Special invitees to the latter are the members of Gyut and the relatives. Naming ceremony is called as Meen-Tzus. It may be mentioned that the names are never chosen by the parents themselves. At the same time no part of the parent's name is necessarily inherited. The surnames do not exist among the Ladakhis. Certain popular names are common to many people. Usually the names are associated with some meaning. A name consists of two separate parts communicating separate meanings. Normally, the names are in the context of days of the week (preferably the name of birthday), blessings for long life, prosperity, good luck and goddess. The last one is chiefly found among the women and it is after Drolma or Dolma, a goddess more concerned with the women and their life. The women, like the men, have two parts of their names. One part of the name, so often heard of, includes Tashi (Tuesday), Sonam (good luck), Diskit (happiness), Dorje (or religious significance), Dolma (liberator) etc. Name is, thus, not independent of many other aspects of Ladakhi life and culture.



## Death Rituals and Ceremonies

The Ladakhis take diseases as the major cause of death. But then the concept and cause of diseases have religious roots. Diseases are believed to be sent by the supernaturals. Of the latter more responsible are the ghosts and the spirits. Some other gods and goddesses too cause sickness when in angry mood. Even in case of animals the sickness is believed to be caused by the superantural forces. Out of malevolent spirits Shinte or or Shinde is stated to be the most mischievous and harmful. Sudderly a person gets suspicious that he has been overtaken by some ghost. Such a feeling causes fear and sickness to the person. Shinde is believed to have three forms, that is, Chan, Gyapo and Teemo. People's conception of these are that they are invisible and move around in the air. The imagination for Gyapo and Teemo is that they ride on a horse and wear red clothes. A patient believed to be suffering under the affect of Gyapo and Teemo may recover only after the Onpo suggests for remedial worship. The villagers make figures of spirits. This is done with Sattu paste. These figures are ultimately thrown away. The Ladakhis believe that a man, after death, becomes ghost if his greed for the wealth, he is leaving, continues to be expressed till he breathes last. Chhoskong Shungma is believed to be a protector against the ghost and hence helps to save a person's life. Its image may be kept in Chhotkang or Gompa. When a person dies suddenly, say as a result of some accident or otherwise, his soul does not find proper abode and assumes the form of Shinde. This happens because a person dies without fulfilling many of his wishes. Shinde may even prove helpful if kept appeased. Otherwise it causes sickness. A worship, termed Zinshak, is performed by the Lamas to ward off the effect. A sketch of Shinde is drawn on a paper. It is later on burnt by Onpo, and the ritual helps to ward off evil effects. In regard to life-span, the Ladakhi view is that those who do good deeds would have a longer life. And the age of a person would be less if he or she has been indulging in bad acts. With all this it is also believed that a person dies when gets old. Death can also be caused by suicide is yet another version of the Ladakhis.

Another popular belief is that Sangyas (Lord Buddha) is chiefly responsible for life as well as death. If Sangyas is keen to retain a life, the person survives; else the person dies. Sangyas can cause death through sickness or accident. People further add that life-span is fixed by Sangyas, taking stock of past actions of the person. A person, considered good by

Sangyas, not only enjoys long life but also meets an easy death. Otherwise the person keeps on suffering with some chronic disease and breathes last after bearing lot of hardships.

### **Treatment with dead body**

While breathing last the person desires to give final instructions to the remaining family members. The act is known as Khachen. Simultaneously, the person, heading to death, is advised by the priest to forget of the worldly things, especially of wealth and children. The priest further directs the person, struggling with death, to concentrate on Chhotkang gods and religious men.

Soon after a person dies, the Lobon, a superior Lama, or any other Lama is called for. The relatives and Phasphuns are simultaneously intimated of the incident. When a person is dead, Chinlap, a round tablet made of Sattu paste, is kept in the mouth. The tablet is made during the course of worship performed at the time of death. The Lama does so. Keeping of Chinlap in the dead person's mouth is believed to help remove all sins which the person had committed in life-time. Thus, the sins do not accompany the person in the life after death. Thus, the Lama's role is very important. From birth onwards the Lamas keep regulating the life of a Ladakhi. At birth, they wish happy life and future to the newborn. And when sins are committed in the life-span, the same are removed at the time of death.

Unless Lama comes and preaches a sermon, known as Phoi or Phoa, the dead body is not be touched by any one. Phoi is the death worship performed by a single Lama. The completion of worship takes about an hour. The functional importance of this worship is to channelise the dead to heavenly path. Phoi is also believed to help give a better rebirth. People assume that this worship helps cause a hole in the head of the dead. This outlet paves way to mind and consciousness pass out. During the course of this worship the head of the dead person is carefully watched. If the people can observe the head sweating, it is derived that the rebirth would be in some better category. Phoi's function is, thus, multipurpose. During his sermon, as part of worship, the Lama also keeps some butter on the dead man's head. Alongwith butter, a medicine, known as Rillu may also be kept. In many cases the dead body is shaken while putting Phoa (butter and Rillu put on the head are also known as Phoa). This is done when some doubt is left on the death of a person. Death is ascertained if shaking makes no change.

Only after the rite of Phoa is over, the Phasphuns alone are allowed to touch the dead body. The clothes of the dead person are removed by them. The naked body is given a bath and arranged in sitting posture, with folded hands. The body, covered from head with old or new white clothes, is then tied with thin rope and put in a sack. It is kept in one of the corners of the house. The dead body can be seen and handled



only by the Phasphuns. No one else is allowed to see and touch it. The dead body is then retained in the house for as many days as the Lamas suggest. For how long the dead body is to be retained and on what date and time and in what direction the body is to be cremated are suggested by the Lamas. They do so in consultation of sacred literature. The Lamas calculate the days of retention keeping in view the family's economic position. A normal principle is that higher the social and economic standing of the dead and his family, more would be the number of days for which the dead body would be kept in the house. The duration may be as long as one month provided the weather conditions do not adversely affect the corpse. As long as the dead body is retained in the house the Lamas keep on doing their worship. Worship starts every morning and continues till late evening. The Lamas keep on reading the sacred literature in the interest of better future of the dead. Some informants have also stated that the dead body is arranged in sitting position just prior to the cremation. Lamas are given the best possible food on the occasion. The Phasphuns look after all activities and the Lamas. Though the death is an occasion for sorrow, the Lamas eat the best and to the full. Throughout the day their cups and plates are full of one eatable or the other. The Lamas are given special care during worship because they are believed to help the dead person for a better abode. Under the circumstances the family of the dead remains highly obliged to the Lamas for their performance. All Lamas from the nearby monastery come to participate in Chhoga, a worship arranged on the day of cremation. They keep aside a little portion of the food or drink before eating or drinking the major portion. The portion, set apart, is believed to be the share of the dead person. After Chhoga is over the Lamas give a green signal for the cremation of the dead body. The Lama, conducting Phoa, sits separately from those Lamas who do Chhoga. The Ladakhis cremate their dead. The dead body is preferably carried by the Phasphuns. This is done under the direction of Onpo. The time and day of cremation are intimated to the villagers and relatives. They all join carrying Roti, Sattu, Chang and Thalluk, (specially prepared cake of flour). On this occasion people join from all ethnic groups and religions.

The dead body, properly fitted in a box, is carried to the cremation ground on shoulders by four Phasphuns. When tired, they can also be substituted by other Phasphuns. If four Phasphuns are not available only one may carry the dead body on his back. The latter is a common practice among Beda, Gara and Mon as their Phasphuns are not easily available. Some are of the view that the father's dead body is carried by his sons. A woman's body may be carried by her son or husband. But it is done for a short distance, say from the room to the main gate of the house. The occasion is marked by loud weep of close relatives. From the day of death to the day of cremation, the weeping, by one or the other mourner, is heard of. While weeping, the mourners shout of good qualities of the dead. The Lamas, in their typical dresses meant for the occasion,



give lead to the death procession. The women do not participate in the death procession. Some processionists carry a piece of wood each. The dead body is then either kept, after removing clothes meant for its decoration, near or sometimes directly inside a rectangular structure made of bricks or stones plastered from outside. This structure and place around it are kept clean by giving a new coating of clay plaster. Lamas start the relevant worship. The relatives and Phasphuns of the dead make three rounds of the structure (sometimes referred as Purkhang). While taking rounds they also bow to the dead. The body is then set on fire through wide openings left at the bottom of the structure. This is done by one of the Phasphuns. In most of the cases the Lama supplies the initial fire.

The cremation of the dead body in sitting position, and the specific structure in which the dead body is cremated, have a special reason. The arrangement shows how the Ladakhis have adjusted themselves with the ecological conditions. Ladakh faces acute scarcity of fuel including wood. People cannot afford to waste fuel. The Ladakhis feel that the cremation of dead body in straight position would require more fuel than what is required when the body is cremated in sitting position. Likewise the particular structure, in which the body is cremated, is meant to check the fast winds that blow in Ladakh and which may disturb the flames in the absence of structure. The arrangement is so designed that the cremation is done with the least quantity of fuel and with the limited flame-target area.

### Yingshak

The ritual of Yingshak refers to a ceremonial addition of rice, wheat, Ghee, barley, mustard seeds, milk and Chang to the flames, when the dead body is being cremated. These articles are thrown by a Lama during the course of cremation. Simultaneously the other Lamas keep on doing the worship. These things are thrown in little quantity after some interval of time. The addition goes on till the dead body is completely burnt to ashes. The consumable articles, thrown in the fire, serve specific purpose. It is believed that through Yingshak the dead person gets satisfied, and his spirit would not visit the family again. In the absence of Yingshak, the dead person may become Shinde and trouble the family.

Prior to the burning of fire, and after the Lamas start worship in the cremation ground, one of the Phasphuns comes forward for a specific purpose. This Phasphun holds a wide but shallow metallic dish in his hands. The dish contains Sattu cakes. The man carrying the dish tries to go round the structure meant for cremation. He is then followed by a Lama who performed Phoa. Lama carries a small stick in his hand. Both of them pose in a way as if the Lama is chasing the Phasphun, carrying metallic dish, to beat him. Finally the Phasphun, driven away by the Lama, keeps the dish a little away. The function of this performance is again religious. The dead is believed to be attracted by the eatable in the



dish and goes along with it. Driven away by the Lama, and being satisfied with eatables, the spirit of the dead does not trouble the remaining family members. When the body is reduced to ashes people return back to the house of dead. They are again led by the Lamas. All those who participated in the death procession wash their hands and face. The men who carried the dead body remain confined to the house till the worship is over. The Phasphuns and relatives supply food to the bereaved family members. It is known as Dugjan. Some informants have also stated that the relatives of the dead can carry his body and put it to fire for cremation.

In many cases the small unburnt bones of the dead are collected from the crematorium and taken home. They are mixed with clay paste after being powdered. It is done because the cremation is usually imperfect under the condition of fuel scarcity, and people do not appreciate if bones keep on lying like this. Medallions are made from clay paste and powdered bones. Sometimes these are given particular shapes, resembling human figure, and then kept in a repository meant for the purpose. Within four days after the cremation the remains and ashes of the cremated are collected and finally thrown either into the water or on a hill top. The collection of such remains can be done even on the next day of cremation. The Phasphuns also prepare Chhaj (small Chorten—the religious structure). They are then worshipped and finally kept in Mane (a religious structure) or thrown in water. This is done for better future and abode of the dead.

The Lamas continue their worship even after the cremation is over. For how long it goes is not categorically defined. The duration of such worship is determined by the economic and social position of the dead person. The higher the social position, or richer the person, the longer would be the duration of worship. The richest possible food, Chang and Gur Gur are made available, in abundance, on this occasion. Lamas eat to the full. In addition, the Lamas are also given some remuneration for their services. Some may even give one or more goat or sheep to the Lamas.

### **Bulba**

After the cremation of dead body, and when people return to the house of the dead, a day is fixed for the auction of dead person's personal belongings. His dress, utensils and other personal articles are sanctioned. This is done on any of the days when the Lamas are performing worship. The relatives and villagers are informed of the date of auction. All, including Lamas, are entitled to buy the articles. Many of these articles are new too. The money raised from this auction is donated to the Lamas and Gompa. The ceremony is known as Bulba (though Bulba chiefly refers to articles of dead) and is meant to sever all connections of the dead from the house where he lived. When Bulba is not done the spirit of the dead might



visit the family for personal belongings and trouble some member. The auction is organized by a Lama and the Phasphuns. The articles bought through Bulba are made use of. The division of money, obtained from Bulba, is, at times categorically defined. One fifth is given to the local Gompa and the rest, in equal proportion, goes to two bigger Gompas of the region. Lamas may also be given some portion of the same, if need be. Some respondents have stated that the entire money is distributed among the Lamas only. More of it goes to Gallong (chief Lama) and less to Chung Jung (younger Lama). A part may also be sent to Kushok. The money raised through Bulba, and given to the Lamas and Gompas, is again believed to be indirectly helpful to the dead. The religious forces, it is thought, manage to provide economic help in the next life. Also, the Ladakhis feel that it creates conditions which help manage rebirth in a better category. Sending of Bulba money to Gompas is also believed to provide protection against the spirit or ghost of the dead.

Langanj is a rite which involves performance of worship by the Lamas, as also a feast organised for invitees. The family members of the dead organise it after one month of death. The Phasphuns carry food and other eatables. Almost all the villagers come to participate. Langanj helps remove the sins of the dead so that the entry into new birth becomes easier.

### **Zipchu-Yargoo or Zarju**

This again refers to a worship organised on 49th day after the death of a person. Zipchu-Yargoo is not the final ceremonial worship related to death. Rather it is one in the chain. On this occasion too the Lamas are invited in the house of the dead. They read, as a part of ceremony, the sacred literature from morning till evening. In return they are served food and drinks. Some families may offer money. The relatives are again invited on Zarbu. For close relatives the participation in Zipchu-Yargoo is obligatory under the kinship rules. Reciprocity forms the basis of such participation. The relatives and other villagers come to participate carrying pots of Chang and Gur Gur. The functional importance of Zipchu-Yargoo is again connected to the welfare of dead. It is further believed that the spirit of dead may assume a revengeful attitude if such a ceremonial worship is not arranged for. The dead men's spirit is believed to visit the family on 49th day. And the same is satisfied to see the Zarju going on.

### **Turen or Sizak**

Turen corresponds to death anniversary involving a ceremonial worship. In the annual cycle Turen forms the final ceremony organized for the dead. The Lamas are informed of the day. They come with their sacred literature. The relatives also come to participate. Sufficient quantity of Chang, Gur Gur and food are prepared to be served to the



Lamas and the relatives. Some of the villagers also participate and are served food and drinks. The death anniversary is celebrated for three consecutive years. It is given up later on. The departed soul is remembered and revered through Sizak. No trouble is anticipated after that. Turen, alongwith other religious rites connected to death, is believed to help achieve salvation. By doing so the spirit of the dead fails to take a bad attitude to the family members left behind. The Ladakhis are of the opinion that if Turen is not performed, the spirit might trouble not only the family members but also other villagers. Some also opine that death rites are meant to take the dead to heaven. Otherwise, it may turn to hell. Mane, Chortens (religious structures) and the residence of the bereaved family are plastered with white clay on the occasion of Turen.

After the death in a house, and sometimes in normal course, the Ladakhis go in for Samgo-Namgo. Latter is a model made out of clay paste, long grass pieces and the skull of a goat or sheep. The material is so arranged that it resembles human figure. Samgo-Namgo is made on the front wall, adjoining to the main entrance of the house. The skull is so fixed that it forms the upper portion of the figure. It is covered by the grass. Down below the skull are made the body parts. This is done with clay paste. The lower portion is again of the dry grass fixed in clay paste. The human figures guards against the ghosts (especially Shinde) and evil spirits. Samgo-Namgo is competent to drive away the ghosts and evil spirits. Every house of the Ladakhis is seen having Samgo-Namgo. Its formation provides them confidence in terms of protection against malevolent supernaturals.

### **Purkhang**

Purkhang refers to death memorial built by the Ladakhis. This is specially done in case of socially superior persons, including Lamas. The memorial is a rectangular or circular structure. It is made out of sand, clay and unbaked briks which the Ladakhis prepare themselves. Purkhang is generally in the cremation gourd, and in many a cases on the same spot where the person was cremated. That's why the structure made for cremation is also, at times, referred as Purkhang. The structure is well plastered from outside. The measurements of death memorial are not fixed and one can see them of different sizes, though of the same shape. Most of these structures are, however, about five feet in height and about four feet in diameter. Construction of Purkhang is the responsibility of family members alone. The Phasphuns and the Lamas have nothing to do. From inside the structure is kept hollow. Some keep small models made out of clay and ashes remains of the dead in the hollow space. These models, imprinted with sacred words and about six inches long and two to three inches in width, resemble the human figure.

Mini Manes are also prepared out of crushed bone powder and white clay. These are known as Chhaja or Chhacha. They are made in the name of dead. The act is believed to forgive him for all offences committed



in life-time. The offences, say killing of living beings, then do not adversely reflect in the next birth.

Purkhang is considered as the most secured and pious place for keeping remains of the cremated ones. Some of the Purkhangs are nicely maintained with coloured designs made on them. The colour designing is done by the Lamas. But there are Purkhangs in dilapidated condition too. The Ladakhi tradition is that such structures are given new coats of plaster at certain intervals of time. Under the changing conditions people find themselves deeply engaged in new economic pursuits and are unable to spare time for repairing and plastering of Purkhangs. The death memorials made for ordinary persons are known as Ronkang. Purkhang is open from one side while Ronkang is open from the top only. Forty Ladakhi bricks are used for preparing Ronkang; for Purkhang it is eighty. In case of the death of a Lama, the religious structure, known as Chorten, may also be built. It is a very attractive monument and houses most of the Lamas's belongings, including sacred literature. Such structures are shown respect by all the Ladakhis including the religious men.

The age and certain other exceptional circumstances have their say in death rituals and ceremonies. In case of children, below five years, some of the rites and ceremonies, already described, are not observed. Irrespective of sex, the children of this age are not to be cremated. Wrapped in a coffin the dead body of the child is either put in the river, or kept in some interior place in the hills. In latter case the body is kept in a box which is covered by stones. In case of the death of a child some charity is to be made. This is not resorted to in case of the death of an adult. Ceremonies of Chhoga and Phoa are not observed in case of the children. This is not done because the child is considered innocent and free from all sins. Within such a background the child, after death, is automatically believed to take a better rebirth. In case of the death of pregnant woman, the body, alongwith the child in her womb, is cremated in the normal process. The cremation ground is separate for Lamas. Otherwise, the procedure for disposal of a dead body of Lama is not much different. But the performances in his case are done in Gompa campus. Some informants from Kuyul have stated that for reasons of fuel scarcity they have been, at times, cutting the dead body into pieces and throwing the same in river or near a hillock to be eaten up by birds and wild animals. Now some official agencies are working around Kuyul and other areas of Chang-Thang and the Ladakhis, at times, procure fuel (kerosene) from them to cremate their dead bodies. During the course of my field work in Kuyul, the dead body of a female was cremated with kerosene oil. Biscoe (1896) has stated that dogs used to be kept in lieu of graves for the monks, or in other words, to eat up the dead members of brotherhood. The existence of the practice is now denied.

### **Skistak or Lhaskal**

Skistak is not exactly a ceremonial performance. It refers to a



religious painting made after the death of a person. The Ladakhis hold the belief that all persons commit sin in their life. Some do it more than others. A simultaneous thinking is that a person who has committed more sins in life would fail to get rebirth. His or her soul would roam around and ultimately assume the form of a malevolent spirit. The degree of committing sin is determined by the Lamas after they go through the sacred literature. In order that the soul of a sinner may not roam about, and find a suitable abode, the Lamas suggest for the making of a religious painting, popularly called Skistak. The family members of the deceased approach Onpo who tells as to what kind of painting is to be made. The Onpo does so after the consultation of sacred literature and after taking stock of the day and date of the death. Respecting Onpo's imagination, the Spon, a painter, prepares the Skistak. More than one religious agencies are, thus, involved in removing the sins of the departed soul. At the same time these agencies seem to be fairly compromising in the sense that something suggested by one is respected by the other.

### **Chham**

Chham is yet another worship connected to death. But it is not performed by the Lama or any other religious specialist. Any male member of the family can do the job in family worship room itself. He himself reads the sacred literature meant for the occasion. The man deputed for the purpose is not disturbed for any other work. Even his food is served in Chhotkang. The man either reads or keeps on repeating the sacred recitations. At the same time he devotes to the counting of beads of a sacred necklace. Duration of Chham is not defined and the man may remain engaged from a few months to an year. The main objective of Chham is to show the way to the departed soul. Though Chham has a religious significance it is not necessarily observed in all the cases. At times the families are not in a position to spare a man for the purpose of Chham. Then the rites and ceremonies performed by the Lamas and other religious men are taken as more important and effective than those of the ordinary men.

### **Death taboo**

The prohibitions connected to death are not many. One of the prominent taboos could, however, be reported from Sabu. This concerns the spouse of the dead person. When a man dies, his wife is not allowed to cross the water channels flowing in the village. The same would be applicable to the husband if his wife dies. The taboo is imposed from the time the dead body is cremated.

The Ladakhis believe that crossing of the channel would annoy the gods responsible for water supply. It is further feared that the god, out of anger, may dry up the channel causing damage to crops and hardship to the villagers. To respond to the situation the person concerned either

stays back in the house for a period of one month, or manages to live in the house of a Phasphun provided the location of this house is such that the person has not to cross any water channel during the course of his outdoor movements. In the absence of such an alternative arrangement, the person may stay in a tent temporarily erected in the fringe of the village. He or she then need not cross over the water channels. The food and other material may be supplied to him there only. It has been reported that the practice of living in tent in the village outskirts has become more popular after the Ladakhis got into employment. Sometimes a man, after the death of his wife, may not afford to be absent from duty for a period of one month. A labourer on daily wage basis cannot economically afford to be away for a month. So he stays in tent, outside the village, and goes to attend his duty without crossing any water channel of the village. If the taboo is not observed it may pose danger not only to a particular person or family but to the village community as a whole. As such, all are particular for the observance of the taboo. And the lately developed alternative arrangement helps them do the same, even when they have to go out to serve.



## Economic Structure

Agriculture has been the major economy of the Ladakhis. It continues to form the major source of livelihood. Men, women, children and aged are found engaged in one or the other agriculture activity. In busy agriculture season all have to contribute to extract the maximum produce. There being only one agriculture season in a year, the Ladakhis have to be more industrious. Because of the extreme cold nothing grows in winter season. The cultivable land holdings are limited. The total land under cultivation is slightly over 0.2% of the total area of the district. The major part of Ladakh consists of mountains, rivers and valleys. The cultivable land patches are available along the streams and slopes, as also on some lower hills. The soil is of three types, that is, Zung Zing or fertile, Thazing or sandy and Dorat or less productive with pebbles and slopes. From May to the middle of October, the Ladakhis chiefly devote to agriculture operations. Some flexibility can be reported as the sowing and harvesting times are regulated by the weather conditions and altitude. The sowing and harvesting operations are always accompanied by the singing of songs. In spite of putting hard work, the Ladakhis get insufficient produce. As the rainfall is extremely meagre the fields are irrigated with river water. The arrangement is not adequate to meet the requirement. Lack of irrigation apart, the climate too is not favourable to the agriculturists. Untimely frost and snow damage the crops when they are about to ripe. Over and above the soil is not fertile. In this regard the account given by Moorecraft (1937) is not yet out of date. Accordingly, the soil consists almost entirely of the disintegrated rocks torn to pieces and crumbled by the successive congelation and thaw of water in their crevices and chasms, and by the action of snow and torrents upon their surfaces. The mountains being for the most part primitive, the decomposition of the granite and felspar clothes the levels with a coating of clay, sand, gravel and pebbles, which is only rendered productive by human industry and skill. Now the chemical fertilizers are also used by some farmers, especially those who grow vegetable in villages around Leh. In the absence of wood, the cow-dung is mostly consumed as fuel. The Ladakhis use the ashes as a nutritive substance for soil. The human excreta and surplus cow dung are also used for the purpose. Each Ladakhi house has, preferably on the ground floor, a lavatory. There is a big hole in the floor of one of the first floor rooms. To respond to the call of nature, all

members of family use the hole. Thus, the excreta keeps on piling up on the ground floor. The ash is also thrown in the same room. After responding to the call of nature, the Ladakhis throw sand over the excreta. The urine of all sorts of animals, mixed in the sand, is also used as compost. All these items keep on piling up till they are removed to the fields once a year, most likely in the month of May. The garbage serves as manure to the soil. Having lavatory in the house serves another purpose. In the severe winter people need not go out of the house to respond to the call of nature. It is an adjustment with the ecology, and the waste helps achieve more agriculture yield. Animal husbandry, horticulture, service etc., are other occupations in which the Ladakhis are engaged.

Grim, a variety of barley is grown almost upto the height of 14,000 feet above sea level. There are a few varieties of barley whose ripening time differs. Wheat and beans are also grown by the Ladakhis. The buck wheat (early variety), with its various varieties, is grown. In and around Leh, and at some other places at lower heights, the Ladakhis grow vegetables. In Spituk, Sabu and Thiksay, vegetables like cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, brinjal, potato, turnips, onions, etc., are grown. Salad is grown all around vegetable plots. Those who do vegetable cultivation on scientific lines earn more money. Norbu, from Spituk, sold vegetables worth Rs. 3500/- from a field of 8 Kanal in one season only. Some of the Ladakhis have also started consuming these vegetables. No vegetables are grown in Kuyul because of its being at a greater height. Though some of the vegetables were introduced by the Christian missionaries as early as the beginning of first quarter of the current century, their large scale production started only after 1960. This happened with big influx of population from other parts of the country. The immigrants encouraged vegetable growing by giving special incentive to Ladakhis. There is too much demand for fresh vegetables. Cooperative Societies have been formed to regularise purchase and sale of vegetables. In the Vegetable Cooperative Society, there is an executive committee consisting of a President, Secretary and five members. It looks after vegetables, fruits and grass sale. They get a military transport to go to different villages. Days are fixed for vegetable collection. Producers keep it ready and the Society Secretary, with transport, comes and takes it to Army Supply Department. Against the quantity procured each producer is given a receipt which he produces in Cooperative Bank to get money from there.

A vital role in encouraging vegetable cultivation has been played by the Field Research Laboratory, Mutse. They own a farm of about 40 acres. This military farm has done some extension work. The Ladakhi farmers visit the farm to get free vegetable seedlings. The technical know-how and the use of chemical fertilizers are also diffused. But still the vegetable growing is not done, in general, on scientific lines. Vegetable cultivation is also hindered by lack of irrigation.

Conditioned by high altitude the Ladakhis initiate agriculture opera-



tions around April-May. From inside the house, the compost is taken out and kept in open for 10 to 15 days. Then it is carried to the fields and kept there in small heaps at different places. Donkeys are used for transportation of compost. The field is then watered and left for 7 to 8 days. This is followed by the spraying of compost with the help of an implement called Khim. The soil is then ploughed with the help of a pair of Zos. Some make use of horses and yaks for ploughing. The man does the ploughing and the woman keeps on throwing seeds in the furrows. Man can also do the latter job. Simultaneously some big clods and stones are either broken, or thrown out of the field. The activity is accompanied with the singing of songs. At times, one can see number of ploughs operating in the same field. This is locally termed Hang-De. All the agriculturist families are not in possession of pair of Zos, plough and leveller. And hence they depend on each other for certain articles needed in sowing operation. Therefore, it is done on cooperative lines on the principle of reciprocity. To keep it up the irrigation is so arranged that all fields do not require sowing at a time. Those not having Zos can hire them for ploughing purpose. The hiring rate is Rs. 20/- per day for a Zo. The practice is known as Zorla. Fodder for Zo is managed. Men engaged for the purpose get Rs. 5/- each per day. The beds are prepared after the germination of seed. This is followed by watering the field. If it does not rain the field is required to be irrigated ten to fifteen times. If it remains cloudy, the irrigation requirement would be curtailed.

Agriculture and religion are inter-related. The ploughing of the field is usually started in consultation with Kushok. The latter suggests auspicious day for the purpose. The day to start harvesting is also fixed after consultation with the head Lama. A day, earlier to the start of harvesting, is celebrated Shubla. Men from farming families visit each other, especially the relatives, and consume lot of Chang and Gur Gur. In the early morning of this day all adult men go to the Kushok and present him some ear-heads of wheat. He gives his blessings and they all dance with joy. Again in the evening the villagers visit Gompa. It may be pointed out that a large portion of the cultivable land, in a village, is in the name of Gompa. Its entire produce goes to Gompa. For instance, in Spituk, out of a total cultivable land area of 1952 Kanal and 9 Marlas, 436 Kanals and 2 Marlas are in the possession of Gompa. Some owners may also let out their land to Gompa on certain terms of tenancy. From next day of Shubla starts the harvesting of crops. It may be stated that such a performance is done for major crops. If somebody is growing vegetables and if it is ripened he can collect it without Shubla. Cooperation is cultivated in harvesting too. The Ladakhis extend mutual help. The neighbours and relatives help in harvesting on the principle of reciprocity. But if man is engaged on payment basis, he is paid at the rate of Rs. 5/- a day, plus all meals. A woman gets full meals and Rs. 4/- per day. The harvested crop is arranged in small bundles. It is then transported to the threshing floor. Every family prepares its own threshing floor



preferably near the house. Men and women do the transportation of produce from fields to the threshing floor. The produce is carried on the backs. The bulk is then arranged in smaller dom-shaped heaps, the ear-heads facing upward. This is to dry it up. Threshing is done with the aid of domesticated animals like Zos, cows, yaks etc. They are made to move over the produce in circular fashion. The grain is then separated by throwing the crushed produce in the air. It is done with the help of forked sticks, about 5 to 6 feet long. The husk is blown little away from the grain. The husk is used as fodder. The grain is partly stored and partly made into flour, depending upon family requirement. Sufficient quantity of flour, made out of baked and unbaked grain, is stored for winter use. The flour mills, operated by water, do not work in winter because the water gets frozen. So they have to keep sufficient flour for winter use.

That agriculture has its religious dimensions is further supported by the performance of a variety of worship. Chha-Chhush is one such worship organised by three Lamas. When the Ladakhis observe that the wheat plants are getting yellowish in pre-mature stage, they become alert. Such yellowness is believed to spoil the crop and cause decrease in yield. As a counter-check is performed Chha-Chhush. The worship involves reading of sacred literature. Towards the end of worship a skin ball is carried, in turn, by the Lamas to the affected fields. The Lamas go round the fields with the accompaniment of ringing of bells and the sound of striking gongs. Then the skin ball is thrown in the river. The belief is that crop disease goes off with the ball. Another belief is that if the ball, with the flow of water, reaches to some other village, the crops of the latter may be affected adversely. It would be more so if someone happens to break open the ball. In that case the people of the next village would also observe Chha-Chhush.

Likewise Sarak-Doldol, a worship, is performed to protect the crops from pests. It can also be performed when the attack of the pest has already been felt. As a precautionary measure Sarak-Doldol is performed once a year, especially after the ear-heads shoot up and are about to ripe. Almost all the families do it. Five to six Lamas, and even more, are invited to the peasant's house. They read the concerned sacred literature for nearly six hours. Prior to the start of reading, a heavy mass of clay is collected from near a water source and kept in front of the images of gods and goddesses of Chotkang. After the reading is over, the Lamas blow air towards the clay heap. Then the clay heap is converted into powdery substance and thrown over the crops in all the fields. The Ladakhis are of the belief that the powdery substance acts as a pesticide.

It is further reported that the Ladakhis recognise spirits that are believed to preside over agriculture. In order to appease such spirits the Ladakhi farmers perform a ritual. At the time of every harvesting, a few plants, alongwith ear-heads, are bundled together and tied round the central pillar of the house. In the central hall of every house of a Ladakhi



peasant one often finds such bundles tied to the pillar. The bundles serve as offering.

Religion apart, the agriculture has an important relationship with weather. Snowfall has a direct bearing on irrigation. When the snow covered peaks start melting the water flows down. The Ladakhis make use of the same for irrigation. The river water is also used for the purpose. But the river water cannot be lifted to the fields at higher elevation. In such cases the small channels emanating from the melting of snow serve the purpose. And when the snowfall on the peaks is less, the people suffer. Therefore heavy snowfall is always prayed for so that the crops are well irrigated. The lesser the snowfall greater the scarcity of irrigation water.

In Spituk, which is considered agriculturally a progressive village, the yield can be as high as eight times of the wheat sown. But the average is about four times of the quantity of seed sown. In case of barley, the yield can be as high as five times of the quantity sown. The Grim is about three times. It may be mentioned that 12 Batti of wheat or barley or Grim is sown in one Kanal of land. The measure of grain are Batti and Khal, and the measure of land is Kanal and Marla. One Batti weighs two seers, and six Battis a Khal. One Khal is equal to four Bo, and one Bo is equal to five Te. In terms of land measure twenty Marla is equal to one Kanal, and eight Kanal is equal to one acre.

Most of the Ladakhis own land and cultivate by themselves. Those in service let out their land to the tenants. Tenancy is either on contract basis, or involves an understanding that the tenant and the owner would equally share the produce. Some land owners ask for twice the quantity of Khal sown, without their being investing anything. Some may even ask for more, depending upon the fertility of the fields let out to the tenant. The grass, in and around the fields, as also the fodder are normally retained by the tenant. There are others who manage to get their fields sown but are unable to irrigate the same as they remain out. In that case they request somebody else to do the needful. When a person engages someone to irrigate 10 Kanals of land (for crop season only), he pays him two Maunds of wheat or Sattu. He also gets food for the days he waters the fields. The organization of irrigation system, under the condition of scarcity, is an important feature. The channels are to be maintained and regulated. For this purpose are engaged the Chirpons. The villagers do so collectively. A Chirpon is one who channelises irrigation to avoid any wastage of water. He maintains that everybody gets the due share on his turn. The Chirpons see that the channels are not damaged and leaking. They do inform of the turn to the person concerned and make him sound of time when water would be released in his fields. The person is also asked to keep the water channels in order. The Chirpons work for about six months in agriculture season. Each family gives Rs. 3/- to Rs. 4/- or about 2 Batti of grain to Chirpon. Whenever he visits any house during the season he is offered Gur Gur and food. Similarly

the payments are fixed for the watchman of the crops. He is known as Lorapa. The agreement between the watchman and the owner of the crops is made on seasonal basis. From germination till harvesting the watchman is to look after the crops. The payment for this service is made in kind. In most of the cases the payment is arranged in advance. According to the prevalent rate in Kuyul, the crop watchman, looking after the fields sown with 30 Battis of grain, is to be given 13 Battis of grain, half a Batti of butter and nearly half Batti of tea. No money is paid. A common watchman can be jointly engaged by a few families so that no damage is done by the men and animals to the crops. Each family pays as per the area sown. The watchman guarantees the protection of crops except in case of some natural calamity. A Mon or Beda usually acts as watchman and is given his due.

The systems of Chirpon and Lorapa bear a long history. A large number of able-bodied persons among the Ladakhis have been, since past, going out with the flocks of goat and sheep, making somebody responsible for their crops. The requirement further aggravated because in addition to going out with flocks, some Ladakhis are now engaged in services and hence remain out. Lorapa of Sabu is engaged on different terms. He works for about four months and every family gives him one Batti of Grim. But he has another source of income. When he finds an animal eating the crop he reports it to the owner of the crop, as also to the owner of the animal. He also tends this animal to a particular place and does not let it free till the owner of animal makes the prescribed penalty. The amount of penalty goes to Lorapa. The penalty rates are fixed. It is five rupees for a cow, ten rupees for a horse, five rupees for Zo, three rupees for donkey and one rupee each for goat and sheep.

### **Improved agriculture practices**

In respect of adoption of improved and approved agriculture practices the position varies from village to village. The Bhotos of Kuyul have not adopted any improved agriculture practice. They continue to do farming with primitive tools and techniques. The only crop grown is Grim, and that too with primitive method. What to talk of adoption, the Kuyul farmers have not even heard of chemical fertilizers, improved seeds and implements pesticides and technical know-how. Their agriculture yield is very poor. They stress more on livestock rearing.

Contrary to Kuyul, the position in Spituk, Sabu and Thiksy is better. In these villages wheat is the main crop grown. The Ladakhis also grow barley and Grim. Even these villagers grew more of Grim in the past. But lately they have switched on to wheat. Some farmers have tried new varieties of wheat. However, it could not be popular for certain drawbacks. In comparison to other crops the new variety of wheat ripened early and it become difficult to protect it from the menace of



birds. And hence most of the villagers did not use it again. The improved and new vegetable seeds are being tried, except in case of Kuyul. The chemical fertilizers are known to the farmers of Spituk though its use is still limited. The same holds true for Sabu and Thiksay. A common complaint against the use of chemical fertilizers is that its addition causes good growth, including height, of the plants. The longer plants cannot stand the fast winds that blow in Ladakh. The crop, thus, suffers from lodging. Secondly the irrigation requirement is more when the chemical fertilizers are used. Under the existing arrangement of irrigation, it is difficult to meet the additional requirement of water. And if the adequate irrigation is not done the plants become yellow and die out. In Spituk, however, the irrigation arrangement has scope for improvement. There is also the scope for popularizing improved practices provided the extension agents undertake the pains to do so. Ammonium Sulphate has already found favour with many Ladakhi farmers. The least known of the improved inputs are the insecticides. Most of them are neither aware of nor make use of the same. It is also true that the crop pests and diseases are comparatively less in Ladakh. Pesticides are not much of a necessity to them is the feeling of some Ladakhi farmers. Protection against pest and disease is believed to be provided through the performance of a worship. The agriculture implements are of the traditional kind. Belcha is the only later addition caused after the induction of army. It is mainly used when irrigating a field. Most of the farmers have yet to see the improved implements, their adoption would come later. A few of the Ladakhis, especially in Spituk, partly understand the technical know-how connected to vegetable cultivation. For other crops they continue to depend on the traditional techniques. The high yielding varieties have yet to reach them.

## Land

To be the owner of land carries more value and higher status in Ladakhi society. Those who own land are rated high not merely in the economic sense but also in the arena of social life. The detailed pattern of gradation in Ladakhi population has already been discussed in the chapter on social stratification. The land-owners are better off and enjoy a better social status. The landless ones and the tenants have not much of say in the socio-economic and political life of the Ladakhi society. Kalhons, the socially superiormost people, are the chief owners of land. In this aspect they occupy a position only next to Gompa. Goba and his assistants, the Members, are always the land owners. Even the religious ceremonies in a calender year are more for families owning land. The agriculture occupation itself is considered superior to others reported in Ladakh. Land is again treated as a prized possession of the Ladakhis. All, out of the three hundred families, are not the land-owners. Then the land holdings also differ. The following table gives a detailed account of the pattern of land-ownership among the Ladakhis.

Table showing the land-holding pattern among the Ladakhis

Sl. No.	Land-holdings (in Kanals)	No. of families	Percentage
1	up to 10	81	27.00
2	10. 1-20	66	22.00
3	20. 1-30	51	17.00
4	30. 1-40	21	7.00
5	40. 1-50	27	9.00
6	Above 50	39	13.00
7	Landless	15	5.00

The table reveals that more of the Ladakhis are owning land upto 30 Kanals. Those owning land above 50 Kanals have been the descendants from Kalhon families. The Kalhon families are now the bigger land-holders. The landless, who form 5.00 % of the families, depend on other occupations than agriculture, or work as agriculture labourers.

There are various ways of acquiring land. Such ways have always existed in spite of the fact that the cultivable land in Ladakh is comparatively meagre. Magpa system of marrying is one of the ways. A Magpa inherits the land in the absence of any brother to his wife. Initially, the land is given to the wife but finally transferred to Magpa. Magpa marriages are regarded as the preferred ones. It is because of the fact that the property is acquired through this form of marriage. A Magpa, according to the customary law, cannot claim for land and other property from his real parents. The land is also acquired through general inheritance procedure. According to the traditional law of inheritance, the male (and in the absence of male, the female) primogeniture system of inheritance was maintained to prevent the fragmentation of land holdings. The Ladakhis have been holding that they have smaller cultivable holdings and their further fragmentation, in the absence of primogeniture, would be more uneconomic. Under the customary laws of inheritance a daughter, married as Bagma, cannot claim for parental property. When the eldest son dies without having any issue, the next heir of the property would be the next eldest. Now, however, the pattern is different. All are eligible to inherit the parental property, including land. In the absence of a son, the daughter may inherit. And in the absence of both the adopted child may also get the property. In case a couple has no issue and at the same time they do not adopt a person, the land either goes to the next heir, that is, brother or his children. Beyond that the land left unclaimed is added to the community land. The land is also transferred in the name of Gompa. This happens when the issueless couple had taken a loan, in cash or kind, from the Gompa and subsequently failed to return



it till their death. Under such circumstances Gompa is authorised to take possession of the land of deceased. It may be pointed out that Gompa is liberal in advancing loans to the villagers. Normally the loan is in kind but it can also be in cash if the need be. The Ladakhis take wheat, Grim, butter, Sattu, tea, etc., from the Gompa. They try to return it within the specified period with some addition in it. Another mode of land acquisition is through purchase. However, this mode has its limitation chiefly for two reasons. Firstly, there is hardly any surplus cultivable land which a person can propose to sell. Most of them do not want to part with their land possession because it is something on which they bank upon to a considerable extent. Secondly, even if someone, owning large acreage of land, wants to dispose off a part of it the buyers are not easily available. People are keen to buy the land but cannot afford to pay for it. The land rates are quite high with some variation from place to place. For instance in Spituk, Sabu and Thiksay, the prevalent rate is from Rs. 600/- to Rs. 800/- per Kanal. But in Kuyul a Kanal of land can be had for Rs. 300/- to Rs. 400/-. The uncultivated land is in plenty, though its ownership is again defined. Under the changing conditions when efforts to boost up agriculture yield are in progress and when cash crops have been introduced, the villagers have further realised the importance of land, more in terms of economic sense. The temporary acquisition of land is also reported in Ladakhi society. The process does not assign permanent ownership. Under the procedure one may get land for cultivation, though ownership remains in the name of the real owner. The system is different from tenancy because here the men, who cultivate, need not give any part of the produce to the owner. Such a temporary acquisition of land is done through two ways. When a family is suffering from poverty its members are provided protection, if asked for, by a rich Kalhon family. They are given a place to live and some land to cultivate. In return the members of the family work for Kalhon. Whatever they grow on the land, allotted to them, is theirs. Sometimes this arrangement continues for generations. The second mode is when a person mortgages his land. The land acquired through mortgage is to be surrendered back when the accounts are cleared. So long as it is not done the man, to whom the land is mortgaged, continues to cultivate it and enjoy the entire produce.

### **Animal husbandry**

Animal husbandry is one of the occupations of the Ladakhis. The number of animals reared by a family indicate the economic status of its members. The consideration is that more the number of animals in a house, the better is its economic position. Rearing of livestock is done at all heights. The animals reared, however, may differ with the height. Highlanders mostly domesticate sheep, ponies and horses. For grazing large flocks of sheep, some of the Ladakhis move from place to place.



The movement is governed by the availability of the grazing grounds. This is normally along the river banks and in the valleys. The weather has its own hand in determining the directions of in which the herders move. In winter they come down to lower heights; in summer the flocks are driven to higher altitude where the vegetation is available. As more of the hills are barren and naked, the Ladakhis know of, and move only to those where grazing facilities exist. They move with tents and make night halts at places found convenient for the purpose. Chiefly the men go out for this venture. Such a long absence from the house provides one of the explanations in support of polyandry. When one husband goes out on mission, the other, staying back, would look after the common wife. It may be mentioned that the Chang-Pas, the highlanders, are nomadic people who move with their animals. Others are semi-nomadic, and that too only a portion of population. The pastures are of two kinds—one belonging to a family and the other to the village community. In the former case the ownership is vested in the name of the individual and only his animals graze there. But in the community pasture anyone from the village community can graze the cattle. The same holds true for the government land. The hills have also been divided between the villages. Members of each village can identify the hills, alongwith pastures, if any, belonging to them. Territorial sanctity is maintained by the members of different villages and they do not go in for unauthorised entry. No encroachment is otherwise permissible.

In addition to goat, sheep, pony and horse, the Ladakhis rear Zho, Zhomo, common cow, yak, donkey and dogs. Zhos are used for ploughing purpose; yaks are meant of transportation and the Zhomos and common cow are the milch cattle. In spite of the fact that the Ladakhis domesticate so many animals the milk production is poor. Sufficient quantity of fodder is not available for the livestock. The position remains so even when the Ladakhis try to exploit all sorts of fodder resource. The Ladakhis are very particular to see that no fodder is left unused or wasted. Such an attitude has helped remove all sorts of weeds from the fields. The families having sufficient fodder and lacking manpower do not bother to undertake weeding operation. The rest make use of every bit of it. After four weeks of sowing, the Ladakhi women start weeding the fields. The grass and weeds removed are used as animal food. This kind of weeding necessitated by fodder scarcity helps provide more food to the crops. Thus, the Ladakhis kill two birds with one stone. The fields are cleared of unwanted vegetation and the fodder is procured for the animals.

Likewise, the Ladakhis are extremely careful at the time of harvesting of crops. They see that the stem is cut from very close to the root so that the maximum of it is available as fodder. Many a times they even pull the plants if soil conditions permit to do that. But mostly they cut it with sickle from very close to the ground. Pulling up of the plant from the root was more popular in the past when there was no other possi-



bility of obtaining fodder from outside as the means of transportation were then poor. That the animals reared are almost double the number of human population is attributed to specific requirements of the Ladakhis. Yaks, donkeys and Zos are used for transportation of men and material. At higher altitudes, where there is scarcity of oxygen, man himself is unable to carry more weight. All families keep at least one, if not more, donkey. Those doing cultivation keep Zos, and more needy ones rear yaks too. The Ladakhis are very fond of Gur Gur. Most of the time they are seen sipping it. The preparation of this tea requires huge quantity of butter in every family. This butter is locally produced from the milk obtained from the domestic animals. For clothing and temporary shelter the Ladakhis again obtain material from the livestock. From yak's hair are prepared the ropes and tents. Woollen cloth is made out of the wool procured from sheep and goat. The Ladakhis themselves spin and weave rough kind of cloth which is quite good for the climate of Ladakh. A major part of fuel, so much required in extreme winter, is obtained from animals. Part of it is used as compost. The skin worn by the women on their backs, a very common feature among Ladakhi women, is the goat or sheep skin. Such a wear is not only prestigious but also provides protection to cotton or woollen under-garments worn by the ladies. The total livestock in possession of the three hundred families is as under.

**Table showing the animals domesticated**

Sl. No.	Domesticated animals.	Number of animals
1	Cow	603
2	Zo	231
3	Zomo	99
4	Horse	96
5	Bhedu	1410
6	Goat	102
7	Ass	312
8	Dog	213
9	Poultry birds	219
<b>Total</b>		<b>3285</b>

The table reveals that on an average every family domesticates eleven animals. In the severe winter the requirement for woollen clothes is more, and so is the number of wool-giving animals.

In addition to their own needs, the Ladakhis had, in the past, to keep more milch animals to supply butter, milk, fuel, etc., to the then ruler. This was done for the king as well as the Governors of the districts. These contributions were obligatory. The Ladakhis continued to be involved in the practice till the traditional political system came to an end. The replacement of traditional hierarchy by the new order provided relief to the people. But in spite of the change the decline in livestock population has not been significant. The animal population being large, most of them stay in open. All of them cannot be accommodated under the roof. For goat, sheep and yaks there are big enclosures for the purpose with boundary wall to check the fast winds. If the winter prolongs and remains more severe many of the animals meet death. But to normal winter the animals are well adjusted.

Though all the animals fulfil one or the other need of the Ladakhis, the sheep providing Pashmina wool is of much value to them. This particular wool has, over the centuries, been the costliest item of export. In past the stock of Pashmina, collected by the inhabitants of greater heights, was transported to Leh and exchanged with other essential commodities. There were trade agents for the purpose. Lately, as the outsiders have gone to all heights they purchase a good quantity of this wool and manage to send it to the plains of India to get pull-overs and shawls made out of it. This particular wool is in great demand in Kashmir where Kashmiri shawls of best quality are made out of it. Extraction of Pashmina is a cumbersome process. Pashmina is a growth beneath the normal hair and just above the skin. This under-fleece is taken out with the help of a particular implement. To startwith, the long hair of the animal are cut to smaller size without disturbing the direction of its growth. Then a comb-like implement is pressed in the reverse direction to the one of hair. This is moved along the skin, almost touching it. The implement helps take out Pashmina along with some hair. The hair are then carefully removed from it. The Ladakhi women do it by picking up with hands. It is a very long and slow process. More the hair removed, the better would be the quality of wool.

In spite of difficult climatic conditions and scarcity of fodder the prices of the animals are comparatively higher. Not that the milch cattle alone cost more, the others too are bought and sold at fairly high prices. The background is that these animals also fulfil many requirements.

### **Horticulture**

In the lower regions the Ladakhis grow apple, apricots and walnut. Kuyul is at a height of about 14,200 feet, and no fruit is grown there. Apricots of various varieties continue to be in surplus. Previously these were dried in large quantity and exported outside Ladakh. But now the demand for fresh apricots has increased because of a vast influx of outsiders in Ladakh. The Ladakhis, by and large, do not now feel the nece-



ssity of drying them up. But still a part of the produce is dried up. It does not spcil for a few years. Export of this product to Lhasa has since long been stopped. According to Moorecroft (1837) nearly 600 maunds of dried apricots were exported to Lhasa when he visited Ladakh. Like apricot, the apples too are of a few varities. They are light, juicy and of medium size. After September the apples can be stored for months together. Because of the cold they would not spoil. More fruit are grown at lower regions, especially from Nurla to Kargil and in Nubra valley. The fruit trees start flowering in April and May and the crop is ready by August-September. Some of the apricot varieties ripe early. There are no wild fruits except the orange-coloured berry. This is consumed by birds as well as the human beings.

The forbidding climate of Kuyul does not allow them to grow any fruit tree. But apricots and apples are grown in Spituk, Sabu and Thiksay. There is a big demand for these fruits. Apart from civilians from outside Ladakh, the largest buyers are the military and semi-military organizations. The Ladakhis are paid the prices demanded by them. Apples are sold by number and not by weight. The civil administration in Ladakh is making efforts to expand the horticulture activities. Better quality fruit plantation is being introduced in lower regions, keeping stock of their survival under local conditions. The increasing demand of fruits against cash payment has given incentive to the fruit growers. The horticulture activities are on way to expansion.

### Subsidiary occupations

In addition to agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry, there are other occupations having important place in the economy of Ladakhis. Among Ladakhis, more so around Leh and Spituk, wage-earning has rapidly expanded. As the construction activities fast developed during the last about two decades, the Ladakhis got ample opportunities for wage-earning. A large number of young men and women from Spituk, Sabu and Thiksay are employed as labourers in various civil, military and para-military organizations. Every labour is paid at the rate of Rs. 140/- per month with Sundays and other holidays off and every Saturday as half-day. These civilian labourers also manage to procure some old dresses and the left-overs of food. In case the site of work is at some distat place the military transport is sent to fetch the labourers. In the evening they are transported back to their respective villages.

Because of a rapid expansion of civil and defence departments in Ladakh many people got into regular service. In various capacities, the Bhotos have joined various organisations. Except a few officers, most of the Bhotos serve in lower-caders. As the occupation of animal husbandry is important in Kuyul, so is the wage-earning in Spituk, Thiksay and Sabu. In a few families of Spituk the income, through wage-earning, is higher than what they get from agriculture. Each of such families has



four members employed as civilian labourers. This makes them earn Rs. 600/- per month. Such an attraction of money has diverted the attention of some people from agriculture and animal husbandry. The women work more in the fields. In families where all adult men and women go out for labour or other jobs, the agriculture fields and livestock are left to others. The latter look after them as per the fixed terms and conditions. In Spituk, if a man looks after the livestock the owner gets half of the total butter produce.

Among the other occupations of the Ladakhis are spinning, weaving, shoe-making, brick-making, masonry, and carpentry. Sewing is a later introduction. Grinding of grain is also the occupation of some of the Ladakhis. These people own water-operated flour mills. With the force of water flow the grinding stone rotates and does the grinding. The occupations of Gara, Mon and Beda are specialized. If not more, atleast one member from each family knows spinning and weaving. Spinning is so common and casual that one can find a Ladakhi male or female spinning even while going to some place or while standing or roaming about in the market. During the course of conversation too many of them keep on spinning with a small spindle arranged for the purpose near the lower part of abdomen. This is how they prepare woollen threads for weaving. The woollen cloth is prepared by the Ladakhis themselves. There is no taboo for weaving on the basis of sex. Small woollen carpets, popularly known as Ladakhi carpets, are locally prepared by them. Such carpets are nicely spread in the Chotkang. The demand of woollen clothes is locally met. Looking to the rising demand for Pashmina shawl the government has lately set up weaving centres in Leh, Kargil and Nyoma. The shawls, carpets and other articles manufactured in these centres have ready market. The cotton cloth is always bought from the shops. Likewise, the Ladakhis have been making their own shoes. Now, the company made shoes are also used by many. These are bought from Leh. Such shoes are generally worn while visiting Leh, or while attending some other function or fair. The traditional shoes are, however, no less in use. Not all Ladakhis can prepare them. But there are some experts. The sole of the shoe is made out of woollen threads properly knitted and weaved. Women can also prepare the shoes. The height of this shoe sometimes reaches upto the knee, providing protection against cold winds. The designs made on the shoe are attractive, especially when they are multicoloured in nature. Members of both sexes wear similar kind of shoes.

Like the woollen dresses and shoes, the Ladakhis depend on their own resource for house construction. Brick-making is a small scale cottage industry in Ladakh. Almost all the adult male members know the art of brick-making. The bricks are prepared with the help of a wooden frame and are sun-dried. Big in size the bricks are rectangular in shape. A fine clay paste is first prepared and the frame is then filled with it. Later on the wooden frame is pulled up leaving the brick behind. In order that



the wooden frame does not get stuck to clay, its interior surface is moistened. The bricks are then left to dry. The Ladakhis are so efficient at brick-making that two of them can prepare 500 bricks a day.

Ordinary masonry work can be done by the men of almost every family. But for better construction the specialists (Ladakhis themselves) are engaged. Normally, the specialists, when engaged by others, do not charge anything. They only take the meals there. The services are rendered on the basis of reciprocity. Carpentry is a specialized job and there are definite people to do it. Ishae-Shang of Spituk, a Ladakhi, is an expert carpenter and prepares doors, windows, tables, etc. He does it with lot of carving and engraving. Ishae-Shang works as carpenter for all and charges rupees five per day. Like carpentry, ironsmithy is also a specialized job and is not done by all. Only the Garas are the blacksmiths. Sewing, as in occupation, has lately caught the attention of the Ladakhis. Sewing machines have become more popular in Spituk. Fifteen families own sewing machines and do the sewing for themselves, as also for others. Both men and women operate on the machine. For others the sewing is done on payment basis. Two of the fifteen families have good income from sewing. This new occupation is not associated with any specific ethnic group. Sewing has, however, not yet been taken as a full-time job.

### Trade

The trade was wide spread in the past. The Ladakhis used to trade with the people of Skardu and Kashmir. The traders from Kashmir and Punjab brought shawls, grain, copper-tinned vessels, including liquid containers and plates, spoons, etc. The consignment also included special kind of Gur Gur and Chang containers. The trade of such items is still there. Salt from land-locked lakes and springs in Chang-Thang was, in small quantities, exported to these places. Other items of export included dried fruits and borax. The chief item of trade was fine wool obtained from underfleece of sheep. This particular wool is still exported out of Ladakh to Srinagar and other places. It is not traded with Skardu and Yarkhand. Shawl wool, felts, tea and silks came to Kashmir from Yarkhand via Ladakh. It may be pointed out that most of the Ladakhis have not, themselves, been the traders but involved in the trade as carriers. Only a handful of the Kalhons and their relations were the traders, especially of fine wool. The rest were engaged by outside traders for various kinds of jobs required in trading. Largely they were employed as coolies for carrying merchandise and for maintenance of the road. As the trade route to Central Asian countries was through Ladakh, Leh happened to be the main centre of exchange of various commodities. Leh had been the meeting place for caravaners from Yarkhand, Kashgar, Kashmir etc. The major exchange was of shawl wool, coarse cotton, borax, salt, gold ponies etc., with sugar, spices, saffron, shawl, cotton clothes, etc. Through



the central situation of Ladakh, the commercial intercourse was between Tibet, Turkestan, Russia and China on the one hand and Kashmir and the plain towns of India on the other.

Till many years after Indian independence, in 1947, the Ladakhis continued their trade with Tibet. Trading with Tibetans was there for centuries, and that way the Ladakhis have been having intimate relationship with Lhasa. Tea was mostly imported from Lhasa where it used to be brought from China. The Ladakhis continued to have heavy tea consumption. Some of the better quality tea was imported from Yarkand. In addition to tea, plated and silver vessels, brocades and silk were also imported from China. The trade agreement of 1954 between India and China came to an end in June 1962. This led to the ending of Indo-Tibetan trade. The trade with Tibet came to an end after the Chinese took over Tibet. However, the dwindling of trade had already started when Sinkiang's borders with Ladakh were sealed by the Chinese in September 1949.

With Baltistan, the adjoining province, trade contacts had been maintained. With Baltis the Ladakhis, as mediators, used to barter wool with the superior quality of dried apricots. Alongwith the fine quality of dried apricots, the Baltis also received wool for waterpots and cooking vessels of grit stone which they supplied to the Ladakhis. Now the boundaries with Baltistan are sealed and the Ladakhis have no commercial relations with the Baltis.

Initially the Ladakhis were not under obligation to supply labour or protection to the caravaners. Help was rendered voluntarily. The terms, conditions and modes of payment were not defined in absolute terms. But after British Indian government's treaty with Kashmir (1870), regulations were made to channelise the trade through Ladakh. It was made obligatory on the part of the villagers enroute to supply labour and ponies at comparatively cheaper rates. This kind of enforcement was termed as Res system. In the post-Indian independence period the Res system was abolished when it was observed that the system came hard on the people.

Now that the foreign trade through Ladakh has been stopped, the Ladakhis involvement in Res and trade has also been abandoned. The internal transportation of goods in Ladakh is now manifold. The goods and merchandise imported in easily approachable parts of Ladakh are then to be sent to remote localities of the district. The Ladakhis are engaged to transport the goods from one place to another. They do it with the help of their pack animals and are paid suitably. As such the stoppage of trade with Yarkhand, Skardu, Kashgar, etc., has not economically affected the Ladakhis. Rather, their earning as transporters are now more than what they had in the past. The Ladakhis carry rations for the troops deployed in the interior and more difficult areas. They are paid at the rates mutually agreed upon by the Ladakhis and the organization concerned. For instance, from Leh to Karakoram, a man transporting



a horse-load would get Rs. 250/-. This amount is for one way, and if he has to reach it both ways he would be paid Rs. 350/-. Likewise the rates are also fixed for other areas.

It may simultaneously be mentioned that the sealing of eastern, western and the northern boundaries of Ladakh, in a short span, did give a momentary jolt to economic life of the Ladakhis. But then the situation could be managed by the added economic opportunities which quickly came up in Ladakh. Expansion of internal transportation, employment opportunities and labour jobs provided additional sources of income. Things took shape in such a quick succession that the Ladakhis could not feel the pressure of economic blockade. The same could have happened in the absence of additional sources of earning.

### Poverty and debt

Ladakhis are partly poor and partly under debt. The nature of poverty is the same but its extent differs. It was observed that the Ladakhis of Spituk, Sabu and Thiksay are comparatively better-off than those of Kuyul. The material possessions and the standard of living of the two differ. Land holdings in Kuyul are poor. The labour and other employment opportunities for them are of a lesser magnitude. But among the inhabitants of Spituk, Sabu and Thiksay every family is not at the same economic level. More of them live from hand to mouth. A few, especially the Kalhon families have more land holdings. Some of their members are in employment too. Being comparatively more progressive they also grow cash crops like vegetables and fruits. Such people have surplus and are having good standard of living with huge double and even triple-storeyed houses. They have sufficient to eat and give loan to others. But the general Ladakhis are under debt. It may be stated that out of 300 families, 146 (48.67%) have taken debt. Among those who have taken debt, the nature of debt is as under.

**Table showing the nature of debt taken by the Ladakhis**

Sl. No.	Nature of debt	No. of families	Percentage
1	Who took money only	7	4.79
2	Who took money plus grain	13	8.91
3	Who took grain only	126	86.30

The table reveals that the requirement of Ladakhis is more for grain than cash. It may be mentioned that out of 146, who took debt, 60 did

so from Gompa only. In case of those who took grain, the quantities taken are as under.

**Table showing the quantities of grain taken as debt (Out of 139 cases)**

Sl. No.	Quantity taken	No. of families who took it	Percentage
1	Upto 10 Khal	40	28.78
2	11 to 20 Khal	66	47.48
3	More than 20 Khal	33	23.74

The informants have stated that more needy are those who have large families and comparatively less land holdings. In exceptional situation, such as drought conditions, more families depend on Gompa for grain.

Among the Bhotos the more prominent form of debt is in kind than cash. The required quantity of butter, grain, flour, tea etc., are borrowed by the needy. This nature of borrowing is different from what is found in certain caste groups in plain India. Here the borrowing and lending are not conditioned by very rigid terms and conditions. The borrower may, at times, return the same amount or quantity. On other occasions he makes addition while repaying. The conditions are not felt as hard. The interest, especially compound, and some other characters of debt relationship are missing in Ladakhi society. There are no professional money-lenders. The system is maintained keeping in view the background of help. The villagers uphold the spirit of help and cooperation. Under the religious purview too they feel unhappy if they find anyone suffering for want of food and other things. Because of simple living of Ladakhis the requirements are not many. The element of economic exploitation is not forceful. But it may be mentioned that in case of the things borrowed from monastery the villagers have to repay more. This is always the tradition.

There are three chief sources of borrowing money or material. These include Gompa, shopkeepers and friends and relatives. The friends and shopkeepers can also be the non-Ladakhis. For borrowing money or material the village Gompa is preferred. In case there is no Gompa in the village, the one to which the family, from sect point of view, belongs is approached. Kuyul, for instance, has no Gompa and as such its inhabitants have to go, for the purpose of borrowing, to Hemis or Henle Gompa. But in Spituk is a Gompa and the needy ones take loan from there only. For Gompas it is almost obligatory to lend money and material. Generally the Gompas are rich institutions and maintain huge stores of various articles required in day-to-day life. Every Gompa has regular funds for the purpose. The Gompa maintains surplus through



its earning from Gompa land, livestock, offerings and contributions made by the people. Gompa store and treasury are open to one and all. Even the non-Bhotos, residing in the village, can enjoy the facility. The system is not complicated. The Chhag-jot of Gompa looks after its property. He is the one approached by the needy. Trust and confidence are the chief factors taken into consideration while lending the things. No signature or thumb impression is ever obtained from the borrower. Only the Chhag-jot keeps a record of the transaction. The Ladakhis depend upon Gompa during lean months, that is, for a few months prior to the harvesting of crops. Help is also sought while conducting the rituals and caremonies specially connected to rites-de-passage. At the time of repayment the Ladakhis return more than what they received from Gompa. Some informants from Sabu reported that they paid, in the past, twenty-five percent interest on the loan. Also, if 100 Batti grain was borrowed, 125 Batti was returned. Now the interest is said to have been reduced to twelve and a half percent. Such conditions further help in enriching Gompa resource. The loans, in cash or kind, are to be returned after the harvesting of crops. The person concerned is not even reminded for repayment. As the things were obtained from a religious institution these are returned without asking for it. The return with addition is also done in the name of Gompa. As the man does it willingly within the set traditions of Gompa, the element of exploitation is not conspicuously observed. It may further be mentioned that in some cases the Gompa's treatment comes hard and harsh, involving an element of exploitation. For instance if the loans taken from Gompa are not returned for a long time, the Gompa management decides to take possession of the land holdings of the borrower. The land is, thus, acquired in the name of Gompa and is cultivated by their men. If the loans are still not returned the land is permanently retained by the Gompa. As an instance, Paldan Chhewang's father Sonam Lagzur, owned land. He borrowed grain and money from Spituk Gompa. As he could not return it for a few years his land was transferred in the name of Gompa. Chhewang is, thus, now landless.

There are no shopkeepers in Kuyul and Spituk. In Sabu and Thiksay a few petty shops exist. But the Ladakhis borrow from the shopkeepers in Leh and Nyoma. Apart from eating provisions the money can also be borrowed from such shopkeepers. Generally, the Bhotos take flour, grain, butter, salt, tea etc., on credit. Such dealings are governed by definite terms and conditions. The shopkeepers either accept, in return, more of Battis, or calculate the equivalent money value and accept the cash. Or, they may also accept wool of equivalent value, including the interest. In that case the rate of wool is fixed slightly low and the person keeps quiet.

The Bhots also take debt from friends, colleagues and relatives. This kind of system is said to be more beneficial in the sense that no interest is charged on the amount. Whatever borrowed is only to be returned—



a feature missing in case of Gumpa and the shopkeeper. Another lately introduced practice wherein the element of exploitation does not appear is to borrow from Cooperative Societies existing in Leh as well as Nyoma. Kuyul people borrow from Nyoma and the rest from Leh. The government departments also provide this facility. Things are available on government approved rates. Rice and butter are preferably purchased from Cooperative Societies. Baam Duniya Cooperative Society, Leh was started over a decade back. Initially the Ladakhis raised some funds by subscribing rupees six each. Then they collected the membership fee of Rs. 11/- each. The government also gave its own contribution as subsidy. An Executive Committee of seven members was formed. Its members are elected every year. The chief function of the Cooperative society is to manage for various commodities at reasonable rates.

### Division of labour

The rules of division of labour are not very rigid in the sense that a particular person would only do a particular job. A grown up person is multipurpose. However, some reservations have still been made on the basis of age, sex, education, physical fitness, opportunity, religious obligation, community expectation and compulsions of societal norms. The aged ones, especially those who are not physically fit, either go out for cattle grazing or relax in the house and keep on rotating the prayer wheel. Sitting in the house they may do spinning and weaving, as also look after the younger children. Some also prepare the shoes if they can. They are utilised for the purpose of watching the crops. When the elderly people are physically fit they also take part in other agriculture activities including ploughing, sowing, carrying and broadcasting compost, harvesting and irrigation. They extend help in carrying loads, preparing bricks, constructing house and fencing walls, digging of water channels, bringing drinking water, winnowing and threshing. Except in ploughing, the young and able-bodied females take part in almost all the above mentioned activities. In addition she attends to the household jobs like cooking, cleaning of utensils and floor, serving, preparing Chang and Gur Gur and rearing of children. It may be mentioned that the cooking is normally done by the younger daughter or daughter-in-law. So long as they are in the house the old mother does not cook. The woman does spinning, weaving, knitting and sewing. A young and physically fit woman puts in more work in the fields than what a man does. The adolescents either go to school or are sent for cattle grazing. They are also, at times, engaged to look after their younger brothers and sisters, if any. But they are frequently seen loitering about here and there, or playing with others of their own age group.

Many educated men and women, specially of young age, are serving in different capacities. From my sample of 300 families one Ladakhi is a Medical Officer from Spituk. Another from Sabu is a gazetted



officer in Indian Tibet Border Police. There are many others employed as peons, sepoy, teachers, postmen, clerks, Other Rank and Non-Commissioned Officers. Those posted near their villages return home in the evening. On Sundays and other holidays they are found working in their fields. They also engage in brick-making, wall construction, transportation of compost etc.

The agriculture work suffers when labour demand is put up by the monastery. As a tradition the Ladakhis are under an obligation to spare and supply the required number of men and women as labourers. These persons would work for Gompa, attend to its agriculture and other jobs without expecting any remuneration. The system has been methodically organised. The requirement of manpower is sent to Goba who fixes, in turn, the families who have to supply labour for the specified period. Sowing of land belonging to Gompa, its irrigation and harvesting are attended by the villagers. And the total produce goes to Gompa. Even if there are no spare persons in a family, to work in Gompa fields they have to manage a man on payment basis from outside the family, and ask him to work for Gompa. At no cost a family can afford to overlook the demand of monastery. When one or more persons from a family are deputed to work for monastery the division of labour within the family gets imbalanced. People admitted that they respond to the call of monastery because the latter provides religious services. But the course adopted is not voluntary. The Goba has to submit to the monastic demand. Consequently his instructions cannot be turned down by anyone.

In spite of the continuity of above system, the Ladakhis now feel less oppressed in terms of the work taken from them. In past the government functionaries, at various levels, were always assigning some work to them. It was to be done under force and pressure. According to a local Ladakhi saying people used to be so tightly engaged that they could not find time even to wear shoes. People remained submissive for fear of authorities in power. The villagers were physically beaten in case of disobedience. Such forced labour and exploitation are no more existing. The old order dwindled after India became free of colonial yoke. The Ladakhis now feel more relaxed. For whatever work they are now engaged by the government authorities the Ladakhis are always paid at reasonable rates. However, their ageold commitment to sacred authorities persists as before. And the people, by and large, do not grumble about it.

## Mechanism of Socio-Political Control

The Ladakhis are basically non-violent and submissive. This is said to be the outcome of Buddhism, the religion they follow. Within this background the major crimes are unheard of. However, instances of deviations from and breaking of norms are, at times, reported. Apart from religion the difficult terrain and hard climatic conditions are said to have contributed in making the Ladakhis docile and less aggressive. Not many problems in the context of socio-political control are, therefore, highlighted in Ladakhi society. On the other hand there are a large number of agencies to control deviations and norm-breaking. Their procedures are so designed that normalcy is revived without much of difficulty. As such the stage of social disorganisation does not come through.

In addition to the agencies, meant to retain the traditional order of socio-political control, there operate other channels in support of status quo. Socialization is one such process, and involvement in religious performances is another. Both are strongly pro-traditional social system. Most of the norms and customary laws have strong influence on Ladakhi life. While growing one comes to know of desirable and undersirable events. Telling lies, stealing, being violent, abusing, disobeying the parents and the religious persons, rejecting the parental offers, showing disrespect to Gompas, keeping Chotkang unclean, back-biting, neglecting social distance with the members of other ethnic groups are considered unwanted in Ladakhi life and culture. Necessary care is taken to avoid the same in day-to-day living. Likewise the participation in religious performances, which are so common in Ladakhi society, makes the growing person more subservient to its way of life. As religion is one of the strongest deciding factors in Ladakhi life-designs, people get conversed with its major parameters more related to their day-to-day life.

### A past view

The pattern of socio-political control, now observed, is marked with some change when compared to the one prevalent in the past. Some change in the compositional front of village council is marked. Some applies to its modus operandi. For instance the death penalty is now unheard of. A view of the change in respect of composition, decision-



making and punishment can be understood when the present situation is compared to what existed in the last century and beyond. Cunningham has stated that "Administration of justice in Ladakh was truly patriarchal. When anyone was injured or agrieved, he proceeded straight to Gyalpo, Kalhon, Goba. An assembly of 5 or of 7 elders of the community was then called to hear and to decide upon the case. Elders are known as Gatpas. Punishment included stripes, fines and imprisonment, and in extreme cases banishment or death. In cases of sacrilege, such as speliation of temples, or in horrible cases of murder, the criminals were either crucified, or thrown into the Indus, bound hand and foot weighted with stones. But the more usual punishment for murder was banishment, or rather ignominious expulsion from society; preceded by stripes and branding. The brand was made of iron and was about one inch in length. It bore a dog's head, with inscription, dog-marked expelled. Thus after being well flogged and branded the unfortunate criminal was drummed out of society, followed hooting crowds, who pelted him with stones and dirt. For the murder of a child, a woman was sentenced to the loss of one hand, and to the expulsion with the same indignities as above. The two modes of capital punishment were drowning and crucifixion. In the latter, the criminal was conducted to the Songsa, or place of execution, by the Shetma, or executioner. The crucifix was a St. Andrew's cross fixed to an upright stake. The culprit was stripped, his hands and feet were bound to the extremities of the cross, while his head was secured to the upright stake by his own hair. He was either quickly tortured to death by boiling oil, or was slowly allowed to expire under all the agonies of thirst and physical suffering. It is worthy of notice that in both of these modes of capital punishment, the shedding of blood was studiously shunned; for the sentence of crucifixion was carried out of binding, instead of nailing the criminal to the cross. There must have been some religious repugnance to putting a culprit to death by any mode that involved the shedding of blood. Mitilation of one or of both hands was, however, occasionally employed. For theft and other crimes, the punishment was three-fold : that is, corporal punishment, or stripes, property punishment or fine, which was nearly always taken in goods, prison punishment, or imprisonment. The corporal punishment was the same for man and woman. The culprit was placed full length on the ground, and received the awarded number of stripes on the bare posteriors. This punishment, however, could always be avoided by the payment of a commensurate fine. In case of imprisonment the culprits were confined in the jail. Theoretically, food was allowed during the term of imprisonment; but practically, both in the provinces and in the capital the prisoner's friends were obliged to supply food to save them from starvation" (Cunningham 1834; Reprint 1970:262-266).

In case of theft, the stolen property, if recovered, was restored to its owner. And a fine, equal in value to the amount of the stolen goods, was levied on the thief for the benefit of the state. If the property was



not recovered a double fine was levied, one half being given to the robbed party, and the other half to the government. This was the punishment for first offence. For a second offence the sentence was loss of the left hand; for a third offence, loss of right hand, and for a fourth offence, death by drowning. The last was rare. These punishments were in all cases of robbery of public property or of monastic goods. But in private robbery the usual influences had then weight. Near relationship might sway the judges to a milder sentence; or a fair bribe, judiciously bestowed might induce the chief Lama of the monastery of Hemis to interfere by an appeal to the King's mercy, which it was unusual to refuse. In adultery where the woman was the guilty party, the paramour was fined according to his means, or received an equivalent corporal punishment, while the husband had the option of taking back the woman if he chose to do so. If he did not wish to keep her, he could retain her dowry. When the husband was the guilty party, the wife could demand back her dowry.

In doubtful cases, a decision was obtained either by casting lots, or by ordeal. In the latter case, the accused had either to draw a red-hot iron through his hand, or take a stone out of a pot of boiling oil without injury. Alexander Cunningham further stressed that the laws of Ladakh continued in force even under the rule of Maharaja Gulab Singh. It may be stated that some of the practices, mentioned by Cunningham, had disappeared in the beginning of current century itself. In the Census Report of Jammu and Kashmir State (1911:211) it has been stated that "In Ladakh the Lamas continue to wield authority in all religious and social matters, although the old punishments of ostracism, throwing an iron chain round the neck, whipping and the like, once inflicted by the local Rajas, have with the decline of their political power ceased to exist; nor has excommunication much force among the casteless Bodhs, but the fear of Kushok's curse, a boycott by the Lamas and non-admission into Gompas have great deterrent effect and make the decision passed by the priestly class on religious and social matters inviolable".

The informants now admit that the crimes are towards increase. But those of the serious nature are not many. There has lately been generated a trend to report the incidents beyond village council. Some Ladakhis make appeal in the Court of Sub-Judge. The latter have replaced Gyalpo and Kalhon. During the course of my discussion with Sub-Judge of Leh, I was informed that his court received 75 cases in the year 1969. None of these was forwarded by the Goba. Even the Sub-Judge admitted that the crimes are towards increase among the Ladakhis, though their number is not as high as it could be in other parts of the country. He further stated that there was a time when Ladakhis did not lock-up their houses. They never had doubt on the integrity, honesty and intentions of a person. But now the situation is changing. The cases brought to the court of Sub-Judge were of breach of peace, land, sex and beating. Instances were reported when Ladakhis went even upto High Court. In all the cases brought to the Court of Sub-Judge, the parties involved were



from the Ladakhis. However, one fellow had filed a case against Gompa organisation stating that his land had been grabbed by monastic hierarchy.

### **Goba and his assistants**

In every Ladakhi village the socio-political control is enforced through Goba, the village headman, and his two or more assistants known as Members. Normally there is one in a village. But the number of Members depends upon the size of population constituting the village. Every village is divided into sections whose number varies according to population strength. Each section of the village is having a Member as its representative and spokesman. For various matters the Members are held responsible for their respective section. Goba, that way, is responsible for the entire village including all the sections. The structure of administration and control is represented through two-tier system. One consists of Goba and the other of the Members. This structure is uniform in all the four villages. It may be mentioned that the institution of Goba has all through been existing in Ladakhi village community. The assistants or sectional heads have also been there, though the term Member (Ghansum) has only lately been introduced. This specially came into force after the influence of National Congress Party on the Ladakhis. Previously, they were not very formally recognised. The basic pattern of the village administration is, thus the same as it used to be in the past. The change of nomenclature is, however, reported. The Members, selected after 1947 got normally registered with National Congress Office in Leh. Through them the village council is connected to wider political party. The term of office of a Goba or Member is not defined. Only the men are ascribed these positions and the person can be changed as and when necessary. The village community is empowered to take decisions in such matters. There is yet another functionary who obeys the orders of Goba and the Member. He has no hand in resolving disputes but simply acts as a messenger of the council consisting of Goba and Members. The man can be sent for any business concerning the village council. He is a great help to Goba. He conveys the messages and carries the news back. The man is also taken help of while raising contributions of various kind. This man, known as Kotwal, is nominated by Goba and his assistants. A Kotwal does not form part of the village council, though he meets certain requirements of the council. Sometimes there is more than one Kotwal in a village. The sectional or Mohalla Kotwal is selected by Mohalla people. Subsequently they get it approved from Goba. The selection is done, by rotation every year.

All the Ladakhi villages have their village councils. Kuyul council is headed by Tashi Pulzor, an illiterate man. As the size of this village is comparatively small, Tashi Pulzor is assisted only by two Members. These three are responsible for social control at village level. As sanctioned procedure Goba has been given more privileges. These he enjoys



independently as well as jointly with the Members. A Goba is empowered to impose fine. He can ask a person to leave the village and can resort to physical beating. When someone does not obey him the person can be dragged to police custody. The Goba is selected by the members of village community. There is no election for the position, and the selection is made with common consent. After his selection the prominent male members of the village escort him to Tashildar (Revenue Assistant). They certify his identity as Goba and the same is entered into official records by the Revenue Assistant. After returning back to the village, the elderly ones consume Chhang to celebrate the occasion. That the Goba is to be always registered with a Tahsildar, and not with any other official, is because of the fact that the former does maintain his association with land revenue—an arena with which the Tahsildar is also connected. On behalf of the government a Goba is deputed to collect land revenue from the villagers under his jurisdiction. He gets five percent of the total land revenue collected as his remuneration. The recovery of revenue is done in collaboration with Patwari (village accountant). In general a Goba is taken as the torch bearer for all important matters. The villagers express that they cannot do without a Goba. A Goba shares the joys and sorrows of the village community. It may be mentioned that the Members after they are selected by the villagers are not produced before Tahsildar or any other official. Women have no say in selecting the village leaders. Nor a female is ever selected for the positions of Goba and Member. The right to achieve these positions is denied to the women in spite of the fact that they have considerable freedom. For these positions the women are considered incapable and ineffective. It is further felt that the females, being preoccupied with household and other duties, are not in a position to spare time for the purpose. At the same time the men do not want that the women should give verdict and decisions. That a woman is debarred on the ground of impurity is not true. Prior to his selection as Goba or Member, man's qualities are taken note of. Simplicity, honesty, truthfulness, social status, reputation and nature of dealings with others are considered. The man is required to be on the positive side of such factors before he is considered for the position. A sound economic background is not an important factor for consideration. One may or may not be rich. For instance the Goba of Kuyul is a rich man having more land and livestock than other inhabitants of the village. But the Goba of Spituk is not a rich man. There are many others richer than him. The social placement of a man is stressed upon. This is one reason why Beda, Mon and Gara can never become Goba or Member. They are treated socially inferior. Socially superior Ladakhis say the Kalhons, are preferred for the purpose. At times the role of monastery is no less important. This is more true for villages having Gompas. When the villagers have some difference of opinion about a selection, they approach the Kushok and request him to name the persons for the positions of Goba



and Member. It may even be done without having difference of opinion. A man nominated by Kushok is not challenged by any villager. Even if such nomination is unpleasant to someone he does not publicly dare to express it. A Kushok's say is final and not to be underestimated. The present Goba of Spituk was nominated by Kushok Bakula. That a man should be more educated to get the positions of Goba and Member is again not true. There are many more educated people in Spituk, Kuyul and Sabu who have not been given the positions. Likewise a man's position in service and his better contact with outsiders do not form the preferred qualification for becoming a Goba or Member. The Gobas of all the four villages are agriculturists and are not formally educated. It is again not true that the positions of village council would only be given to very aged people. There are far more aged and experienced people in Kuyul and Spituk than the current Gobas. Both of the latter are comparatively of young age. The Goba of Spituk is about forty years old. He is uneducated and heads the civilian labour force. Total land possessed by him is sixty Kanal. He has been to Bodh Gaya, and has the experience of air travel. His outlook is broad and pro-change. He makes use of certain improved agriculture practices. This Goba is receptive and helpful to outsiders. The villagers have full confidence in his leadership irrespective of his being an illiterate man.

Since the tenure for the positions of village council is not fixed the Goba may continue for at least five years provided people are satisfied with him. But when a Goba is found behaving partial in decision-making or if he shows signs of dishonesty, negligence and unresponsiveness the villagers dislodge him. With his removal the village council is not dissolved. The villagers inform the Tahsildar who cancels his registration from the records. The removal is not a ceremonial affair. Once a Goba is removed he has no scope for any appeal. The removal of a Member is still simple as the villagers need not even inform the Tahsildar.

There exists a positional hierarchy in village council. The Goba's position is superior to a Member. His rights and privileges are more. The fact is known to all the inhabitants. In minor cases a Goba alone can give the verdict. The superiority of Goba's position is recognised by the government too. One of the Members can officiate as Goba if the real one is absent and if the urgency is realised. In major events concerning village community or the people of a section the representation is stressed upon. Any major cause of concern demands more democratic framework.

Next to Goba in position is the Member. Some concessions have been given to the latter. These specially relate to the people in his section. Being the headman and spokesman of a section he can exert in certain issues. But his version cannot be accepted as binding. People can approach him for advice. The major issues involving wider interests are decided jointly by the Goba and the Members. The people of a section are supposed to have regard for the Member and his leadership. A



Member conveys Goba's instructions to the people of his section. And the desired response is expected to the same. It is the duty of the Member to ensure, on behalf of the people of his section all help and cooperation to Goba.

In spite of positional stratification in village council the Member with his subordinate position is never under-estimated by the Ladakhis. So long as the latter is holding the position he is not to be challenged. The council positions and the incumbants against them are usually rated only next to the Lamas. Such positional arrangement is practically displayed in larger gatherings. For example, in a worship where Lamas read the sacred literature and the villagers participate, the sitting arrangement is made according to the defined positions of the persons. The religious men occupy the highest seats with bigger Ladakhi tables in front of them followed in order by Goba, the Members and other elderly men of the village community. In a ceremony where the Lamas are not present the Goba occupies the first seat. The Members and other elderly participants come next to him. In a sectional gathering where Goba and Lama are not present the concerned Member occupies the topmost place followed by other senior men of the section.

In regard to the roles and activities of the council there is not much of complexity and rigidity. The norms and sanctions are in the knowledge of people though they are not written in the form of code of conduct. Even when two out of the three members are removed by the villagers the council is not dissolved. One man council may function till the substitutes are selected. The quorum is thus not stressed upon except in the event of some important occasion. The conflicts and proposals are not reported to the village council in writing. There is no need of submitting any application nor paying any fees to the council. No nomination papers are filled. Neither any records are maintained nor signatures required. Verbal proceedings and evidences are acceptable. There is no special place to hold council meeting. For major issues involving wider community interests and implication, the council meetings are convened in Gompa campus—it may be an out-house of the monastery. Since this place holds religious sanctity the participants cultivate a fair deal. Because of the religious fear the facts are represented and the decisions made accordingly. For minor matters the meeting may be convened at the residence of Goba. The message regarding the date and time of the meeting of council are again orally communicated. Kotwal who is sent for the purpose meets the concerned persons and conveys the message on behalf of Goba. No written instructions are issued to Kotwal. In addition to sending instructions the Goba may from time to time direct Kotwal for any job. For instance when some senior official or a dignitary proposes to visit the village the Kotwal is deputed to make arrangement for his boarding, lodging and other comforts. If need be the villagers are informed to gather at one place to meet the visitor. The petty officials accommodate themselves in Goba's house. He offers at least one meal



to them. For subsequent meals the Goba through Kotwal asks other Members to manage. In case of longer stay the prominent persons of the village are also asked to arrange for the meals. The family who is to supply the meals is intimated by the Kotwal well in advance. If the visitor happens to bring his horse along, the fodder for the animal is also arranged. Kotwal is attached with the visitor during the course of his stay in the village. The position of a Kotwal is nominated one. He is nominated by Goba in consultation with the Members. There is no fixed tenure for a Kotwal. Every family by rotation has to spare one man for the job. A Kotwal gets no remuneration and at the same time is requisitioned any time by the Goba and Member for his services. No special status is attached with the position of a Kotwal. But the Ladakhis do recognise him as a bonafide messenger of village council and respond accordingly.

In spite of the unwritten code of conduct and oral procedures and proceedings the role of village council is very important. For their superior positions the Goba and the Members have lot to say in the arena of Ladakhi life and culture. It can be seen at some place or the other in the social, economic, political, religious and cultural life of the village community. Justice is imparted, social control is regulated and functions, ceremonies and rites, connected to certain life-ways are supervised. There is frequent inter-play of Goba, Members and other elderly men of the community. And most of the resolutions are an outcome of such an interaction. Opinion and advice of the elderly lot are given due attention. And if conflicts are still not resolved the guidance may be sought from the religious men of Gompa. More often approached for the purpose is Chhag-jot of the monastic organisation. But when something is not decided even at his level, Kushok is the last man to be contacted. His decision is final and his word is almost law to the Ladakhis.

The procedure of holding council meeting is not complicated. The matter is first looked into by the Goba. He then sends for Kotwal. The Members are intimated and are asked to come to a particular place decided by the Goba. In case the dispute is between two parties, their members are asked to appear. And if the dispute is of common concern the other elderly men of the village are also invited. As a matter of procedure Goba introduces the subject and initiates discussions. Others listen to him and react only when he is through. I observed the proceedings of a council meeting in Spituk, held in late evening in Gompa campus. Any participant would speak any time during the course of session, even if it interferes in what the other is saying. One could hear many voices at a time. Things calmed down to some extent when Goba shouted and intervened. Pin-drop silence prevails if they come to know of Kushok's arrival. The head Lama is requested to intervene only in rare case.

The members involved in a dispute are given sufficient scope for hearing. In case the women are involved they are at liberty to express themselves. The Goba and the Membes listen to the arguments and, if need be, they probe further. The hearings are directed by Goba and are



open. Anyone can turn up and observe the proceedings. In addition to those directly involved, some witnesses may also be examined. But it depends on the seriousness of the problem and the demand of the occasion. The spokesmen of the involved parties may also be given chance to speak. They at times speak of their own. Even when unwanted, an observer can also be heard interfering in the proceedings. At last the Goba and the Members give their verdict. The decision mutually agreed upon is made public by the Goba. When it becomes difficult to assess the situation under arguments and counter arguments the village council seeks help of the religion. The members involved in the dispute are asked to take oath in the name of Lord Buddha in support of their statements. It is believed that the Ladakhis being religion-dominated people would not speak lies in the name of Lord Buddha. In case the wrong statements are made the supreme god would get annoyed and they may invite some harm. In this background the facts come to the surface. One at fault would not afford to annoy Lord Buddha. In most of the cases the offender is identified correctly. What a man says in the name of Lord Buddha is acceptable to the members of the council. But if the confusion continues to prevail even after the performance of the ritual the matter is sorted out by Kushok. Or, the case may be referred to Police or Tahsildar. People from Kuyul mentioned of yet another device to solve the complicated cases. It is again religion-oriented. The members of the village council request the head Lama to keep sacred books on the heads of the persons who are to make statement in connection with their case. A common belief is that no one would speak lies after keeping sacred literature on the head. Since major areas of Ladakhi life and culture are directly or indirectly connected to religion, people do not dare to ignore religious sanctity. The religion is equally helpful in the detection of crime. Under the circumstances the statements of the parties are accepted and the decisions made accordingly. Most of the cases are locally settled. Only the case of murder, which is a rare occurrence among Ladakhis is reported to the Police. In a land case the Patwari is requested to intervene when Goba and Member fail to resolve the same.

In addition to the use of Pothis (the sacred books) there are some other means of detecting crime and the offender. When complications arise the persons involved are taken to Gompa and made to argue their case. It is believed that the Ladakhis would not tell lies in Gompa campus. Being extremely god-fearing they cannot afford to make wrong statements. If they do so their gods and goddesses would get annoyed and cause harm to them. Since the guilty one would be reluctant to disrespect the supernaturals, his identification becomes easier. There is another device explained by the informants from Sabu. It is again rooted in religion and the fear thereof. In case of Gompa the element of religion involved is more of respect to the sacred institution of monastery. In the second device the fear of supernaturals conditions the persons involved. Those involved in a dispute are asked to eat a little of sand collected from the



cremation ground. Those who can do so are believed to speak the truth. And the guilty would not do it. And if he does so he is bound to be harmed by the spirits of the dead. A man cannot afford to be harmed by the spirits by concealing the facts, and hence the truth is revealed. The Ladakhis are of the opinion that annoying the spirits would cause far more serious consequences than to accept a guilt. This device is said to be more effective in ascertaining the crime and the guilty and is used only when all other alternatives fail.

The judgement also defines the nature of punishment if it is provided for. There is also a provision for announcing rewards. In cases of minor loss or harm the punishment is mild. The council members ask the offender to manage for a Khatak and offer the same to one not found guilty. While offering Khatak the one at fault utters Zu-Zu (a gesture of respect). The act is equivalent to the seeking of pardon. At times the man, not found at fault, is also offered Chang. This happens immediately after the offering of Khatak. This ritual helps remove ill-feeling. If the case resolved is bit serious a fine of Rs. 5/- may also be imposed. Imposition of fine in cash is common in Spituk. As part of further punishment a man may be asked to arrange for a goat. The man who was penalised, the one who was declared innocent, the Goba and the Members share the fine money or the goat, whatever the case may be. For the money they buy Chang and drink. This brings the meeting to an end. Some informants from Spituk report that the penalty amount is deposited with the Chhag-jot of Gompa. In case of elopement the man is to pay a fine of Rs. 5/- plus a goat. It would be in the case where force is involved. But when it is done with mutual consent, no fines are imposed. Those involved are asked to marry. The theft cases are resolved by the imposition of fine. Case of theft is rare as the Ladakhi Buddhists consider it a big evil. In a rape case the man is fined rupees six to seven. He is further made to seek pardon by saying Zu-Zu to the female. The ordeal is accompanied by the offering of a Khatak. The fine money goes to the female. In a case of injury or physical beating the fine is imposed as penalty. When a person fails to pay the fine his nature of punishment is changed. The council proposes for revenge against the guilty. The Kotwal is directed to tie the hand and feet of the person and to beat him. He continues beating till the Goba and the Members tell him to stop.

Another method of punishing an offender is locally termed as Melam Chhulam. It refers to stopping of exchange of fire and water with a person. It symbolises the curtailment of relationship with the offender. Melam Chhulam is a sort of social boycott though not a permanent one. The background is that the person is made to realise his folly. Even the fear of short-lived punishment is said to be sufficient to revive normalcy in behaviour. The Ladakhis feel that a permanent social boycott would be damaging under the hard conditions of living. Melam Chhulam is practised only in case of gross violation of norms of conduct, say, when one challenges or threatens a Kushok or a Lama of the senior order or indulges



in party politics against the interest of religious men and it poses threat to the community or group life.

In the above events a meeting of the village council is called for. The Goba and the Members invite a few other elderly men of the village. The offender is directed to appear before them. He is given sufficient chance to explain his position. Only when the assembly gets convinced of the guilt the Melam Chhulam is proposed. The news is circulated among all the inhabitants. The implications of social boycott are many. The Lamas stop rendering religious service to the person and his family. People stop visiting his house. He is isolated to organise things by himself. Cooperation and help in day-to-day life are withdrawn. Food is neither offered to him nor his food shared by others. No one would propose for marital relations with the ostracised person and any other member of his family. Such circumstances make existence extremely difficult. Burden of isolation is unbearable. When it becomes very hard the guilty decides to seek pardon from the persons in religious hierarchy as well as those in the village council. The man, concerned, expresses his willingness to accept any other punishment if he could be readmitted to the group. Simultaneously, he expresses his apology and the group considers the appeal. Realising that social boycott is a very severe punishment, the Ladakhis normally avoid committing acts which lead to this situation.

The village council of Ladakhis is a multipurpose agency. It helps resolve disputes related to land, sex, water channels, intoxication and physical beating. Revenue collection is chiefly the job of Goba and the Members. The management of water channels, meant for irrigation, is the responsibility of the village council. The council members appoint the villagers, by turn, to look after the maintenance of such channels. In addition the council has its hand in the organisation of manpower at village level. This is how they manage to spare people for Gompa service, as also for looking after channels and other works. The Goba and the sectional heads keep account of the manpower and its distribution. Attending to any community work, say construction of a school building or Vihara, is the chief concern of village council. The council members have the right to direct people to help in any new construction in Gompa, as also for the repair of the old ones. Their responsibility further involves selection of site and raising of funds for the purpose. A very prominent role of village council lies in the maintenance of status-quo of the existing social order. They also take care of readjustment of norms under changing conditions. Additions and alterations, if any, are channelised through the council. The council members raise funds for Gompa. This fund is utilized in organising religious performances. It is done with the understanding that such religious performances are meant for the welfare of the village community. There is a complete understanding that monastic organisation would look after the villagers, and the villagers would take care of the monastic organisation. On many occasions the fine money is deposited with Gompa only.



### Occupational and opinion leaders

In addition to Goba and Members there are others who, because of their being expert in specific occupations, are recognized as leaders by the Ladakhis. The position of such people cannot, however, be equated with Goba and Member. But the man is esteemed high because of his being expert in a particular skill. Since the villagers bank upon his services, he is rated higher than others. Many a times he is consulted for matters other than what he is expert in. Among such experts Lharje or Amchi is an important man. He is a traditional medicineman of the Ladakhis. To a Ladakhi an Amchi is the immediately available doctor. A government dispensary is given a secondary place. In the event of a sickness the Lharje is contacted first. And if he fails to provide relief people go to the dispensary. A man attains Lharje's status after he undergoes intensive training under a trained Amchi. Many a times an Amchi is contacted only after it is suggested by a Lama. Considering that Amchi is a man of knowledge and experience the villagers even consult him for matters other than disease. His advice does help resolve minor matters.

Likewise a religious man, believed to be controlling the supernatural powers, is also considered a formal leader. The man, known as Chanspa, helps recovery of those who get adversely affected by the supernatural powers. Individual apart, the community as a whole recognises the superiority of Chanspa specially when some calamity is anticipated. He is requested to avert danger. For matter related to supernatural phenomena, a Chanspa represents the village community. At times the villagers may seek his opinion in other matters in which he is not basically qualified. In addition to Lharje and Chanspa, Onpo is another man who occupies a prominent position. Though not included in village council he commands a position of respect. Since his position is a recognised one the villagers show regard to the person. An Onpo is approached under adverse circumstances. And he manages to avoid ill-luck to the Ladakhis. The Onpo is considered as a socially superior person. The villagers bank upon him for his advice and guidance. The interference of religious leaders into secular matters is not ruled out, though it is done when they are asked for it. In village community these people continue to occupy the positions of prominence.

Goba, Member and the occupational leaders continue to occupy their traditional stature. It is so even when more educated people are now available in the village community. More education and better placement in service are yet to be recognised for the purpose of leadership. For instance Norbu, a medical graduate and posted as Medical Officer, is a resident of Spituk. He is a Ladakhi himself but has no place in leadership hierarchy of Spituk. Similarly, there are quite a few matriculates employed as teachers and clerks but having no status and role in local leadership. It may, however, be mentioned that an educated man, representing Kalhon's family, may, at times, be used as spokesman of



villagers when some dignitary visits. Master Norbu from Spituk is one such case. He is normally used for such purpose though he occupies no position in leadership hierarchy at village level. The interesting feature is that the educated people duly recognise the traditional leadership. They, like any other Ladakhi, are submissive to the decisions taken by the village council.

In addition to Goba, Member and the occupational leaders there are some other important men who are considered somewhat above the average Ladakhis. They are the ones vested with minor privileges having more say in certain matters. Chucho or Sangcho head is one of them. Sangcho refers to the section of village. The Member of the village council may also be the Sangcho headman. But this is not always necessary. In some cases the Sangcho headman is different from the Member. A few of the functions discharged by the two are almost the same. But then the Member remains a formal leader and Sangcho head as informal one. Sangcho headman is not authoritarian but is consulted by the people by virtue of the senior position assigned to him by the people. There is no fixed tenure for holding the position. He can be changed as and when liked by the people. The Sangcho headman has more say in Sangcho life. The organisation of monthly worship is his responsibility. At the same time he can be assigned some responsibilities on behalf of village council or the Gompa organisation. If Sangcho headman is unable to distribute work among his people, for reasons of dissatisfaction among the latter, there is an alternative to do the same. Tagril system of Ladakhis forms such an alternative. According to this system the names of various heads of families are separately written on small pieces of paper. These pieces are thoroughly mixed while kept in some container. One piece of paper is taken out of this container and the name written on it is read. Anyone there is to do the required work. He cannot back out and refuse.

The Sangcho heads are also consulted by Goba and Members whenever found necessary. They may not necessarily agree with them but such consultations help explain many things one would not expect from younger generation. When the informations prove revealing it may help arrive at definite decisions. Consultation of Sangcho head is specially desired in matters connected to old arrangements. For instance, he is the most knowledgeable to tell about the traditional irrigation system, its norms and procedure. His advice is sought for, but he has not been given any right to exert as reported in the case of Goba and the Member.

The Ladakhis do have some opinion leaders. Such leaders are approached and taken help of for certain specific purposes. There are persons, atleast one in every village or a group of villages, who have expertise knowledge of animals, crops and other practices prevalent among the Ladakhis. When one thinks of buying an animal he seeks for opinion of the expert, Likewise the opinion in regard to the matters connected with crops is sought from the crop expert. Lately the opinion of educated elites



is taken in matters with which they are believed to be conversant. The latter pertain to non-traditional cultural milieu of the Ladakhis. For instance, when someone is keen to send his son or daughter for higher education, he/she would consult the most educated person in the village. This is to seek his opinion and advice. Similarly a person who has toured outside Ladakh would often be consulted by one who is planning to visit places beyond Ladakh. The opinion leaders are meant for consultation alone and they do not enjoy any authority. Whether one consults them or not is all voluntary. People approach them for their expert background and experience. There is no element of obligation in such an interaction.

### **Village council and wider politics**

There is reported a relationship between village council, monastic organisation and the wider political parties, including those of national character. The former two are interconnected from long past and continue to bear an intimate relationship. Now Spituk council has three Members. One of these is Lob-Zang, a Lama who is the manager of Gompa. His say in secular matters is as important as in the monastic affairs. But the relationship with wider political parties developed lately. Prior to Indian independence such relationship was non-existent. In rigorous form the influence of wider politics on the traditional pattern of socio-political control came only after 1962 when Kushok Bakula, the head of Spituk monastery, got involved in national politics. Some informants have stated that during the election campaign for Parliamentary seat, Kushok Bakula got advantage of his superior religious stature. The village council under his religious jurisdiction decided to take stern action against those who planned to oppose Kushok. The Gobas and Members took special note of those who were opposing the Kushok. It was declared that anyone against Kushok would be denied of the Lama services and community cooperation. At the same time the supporters of Kushok would not allow the opponents entry in their houses, severing thereby their commensal and connubial relations. Under such socio-religious conditions, the Ladakhis did not, initially, dare to show any opposition to Kushok Bakula's election. A big army of Lamas, having hold on the Ladakhis, also got into political operation. The Lamas involvement in political activity was in addition to their religious role. Likewise the interplay of religion, society, and politics was marked during elections of State Legislative Assembly when there was contest between Kushok Thiksay and Sonam Wangyal. Even when National Congress (the Congress of Nehru as the Ladakhis call it) in Ladakh got divided, in 1969, into Congress 'A' and Congress 'B', these were respectively directed by Kushok Bakula and Kushok Thiksay, the two religious heads of two different monasteries.

The Ladakhis continue to give importance to Goba and the Members. For most of the matters they are the first to be approached, and are recog-



nised as the leaders and the spokesmen. But at the same time the superiority of certain other persons is also accepted. For instance, Kushok's position is supreme in spiritual matters. But under the changing leadership pattern, more under the influence of outside politics, the spiritual heads imported recognition as secular heads. In this respect the position is all the more important in Spituk and Thiksay. Since 1953, Kushok Bakula (the head of Spituk monastery) has been the chief political leader. He has to represent Ladakh in all matters. Belonging to Congress 'A' party of Ladakh, he is now a Member of Parliament. For many years he was the member of State Assembly. Although Kushok Bakula now mostly stays in Delhi, he continues to head Spituk Gompa and is a spiritual leader of the Ladakhis. The Ladakhis eagerly wait for his arrival in Spituk and accord him a big welcome for his being their spiritual as well as the secular leader.

The extension of traditional leadership again appeared when Sonam Wangyal got elected to State Assembly and latter joined as a Minister. Sonam Wangyal also belongs to Congress 'A'. The Congress party has become very popular at village level. So much so that the Ladakhis contact the Executive Body of Congress, in Leh, when they fail to decide matters at village level. Decisions, under such circumstances, are sought from the members of Executive Body of Congress. The Goba and the members do not mind the approach. The growing politicisation has sharply reacted to some other areas of Ladakhi social organisation. With the division of villagers into Congress 'A' and Congress 'B' groups, there appeared recognition of Phasphun groups. When two families out of, say, five in a Phasphun group, decided to support Congress 'A', and the rest Congress 'B', there was disintegration in the group. Subsequently the separated families joined Phasphun groups of their respective political interest. Such an impact could be more prominent in Thiksay where recognition of Phasphun groups was remarkable. Forgetting of their long links and association, the Phasphun members deserted the traditional groups. Those supporting Congress 'A' preferred to be Phasphuns of those supporting this section only. Likewise, the supporters of Congress 'B' got themselves united. Many of the Ladakhis were even forced to do so by the local leadership and the concerned Kushok and the Lamas.

In spite of the fact that the men of monastic organisation have been having a big say in Ladakhi society, some people have, of late, started showing indifference to them. The latter feeling specially grew out of the increasing politicization. Some glimpse of disunity among the class of Lamas is another cause of indifference. To meet political ends the villagers were instigated by those having vested interests. As a result of the increasing trends of this kind a party, known as the District National Congress, was formed in 1962. This was in addition to the National Congress, the only political party in Ladakh at that time. The District National Congress was headed by one Tsering Phunchok who fought the election of Member of Parliament against Kushok Bakula, the then head of National



Congress and a Kushok of Spituk Gompa. This was the first incidence when Kushok Bakula faced political opposition. After the defeat of Tsering Phunchok the District National Congress got a set-back and ultimately it got dissolved. But at the same time the political consciousness kept on pricking the Ladakhis. Around 1966 the Kushok (Nanwa Chanba Stanzin) of Thiksay Gompa, belonging to Yellow sect of Buddhism came forward with the idea of forming a new political party. Consequently a party, known as Azad, was formed in the year 1966 itself. Kushok Thiksay became its organizer as well as head. Azad became another political party headed by one of the top-ranking religious men, the Kushok of Thiksay Gompa. Kushok of Thiksay himself fought the election against Sonam Wangyal, a candidate supported by Kushok Bakula. Wangyal was not a Kushok, but had full support of Kushok of Spituk belonging to National Congress. Kushok Bakula, a staunch supporter of Wangyal, was in better position to mobilise masses for his being Member of parliament and head of a bigger monastery. As such the Kushok of Thiksay lost against Wangyal. This defeat led to a shaky position of Azad party which gradually came to an end. However, the differences between two Kushoks and their supporters continued to exist. The defeat of Kushok of Thiksay did not discourage him. In due course he managed to have a few supporters from National Congress causing infighting in the party. The discontented group designated itself as Congress 'B'. The new party was again headed by the Kushok of Thiksay. The remaining section of the National Congress came to be known as Congress 'A'. It continued to be headed by Kushok Bakula, the leader of undivided National Congress. This division of National Congress took place in 1967. The informants reported that the majority of Buddhist population is with Congress 'A'. But most of the Muslims and some Ladakhis are supporting Congress 'B'.

To start with, the National Congress was the only party in Ladakh. For many years it worked smoothly with total consensus of the people. As per the respondents of Spituk the differences of opinion, in the party workers, appeared for the first time over the working of Syndicate (A consumer cooperative shop). The Syndicate management procured pashmina and other wool, at reasonable rates, from the Ladakhis and managed to provide them various commodities of daily use. The Ladakhis met their daily requirement from Syndicate shop. Suddenly the Syndicate faced some crisis and a few of the members attributed it to mismanagement. The management included some prominent members of Congress 'A'. The deteriorating condition led to the dissolution of Syndicate, as also to the bifurcation among the members of National Congress. Subsequently, some members, other than those in the Syndicate management, conceived the idea of organising a new political party. And this was ultimately done. Though Syndicate affair might have been a reason of disintegration in National Congress, the attraction for political power has its own place in the matter.



The bifurcation of National Congress into Congress 'A' and Congress 'B' proved harmful to the masses. For political ends, some of the vulnerable situations were exploited which led to communal disharmony. Efforts were made to achieve political motive in the name of religion. One of such incidents led to the strengthening of Congress 'B'. The respondents from Sabu narrated the incident as it directly involved a person from that village. Yaqub (a Muslim) and her sister Leela Chocho were living together in the same house in Sabu. Both were living comfortably. Yaqub got married to a Ladakhi girl from Nubra. After this marriage Yaqub adopted Buddhism and got his name changed from Yaqub to Chhimat Namgyal. With his Buddhist wife Namgyal continued to stay in the same house where his sister, with Islamic faith, was also staying. After his conversion to Buddhism Namgyal put Bodhi flags (called Tarsho) on the roof of the house he lived in. Leela Chocho objected to it and filed a claim in the court of law that the entire property should be in her name. In the meantime, Namgyal was blessed with a daughter. The case went on for years and in the meantime Namgyal's daughter became young. She was married to Tashi Targis, the President of Congress 'A'. Because of his son-in-law being in powerful position, as President of Congress 'A', Namgyal got strength to fight his case against his sister. Under new conditions Namgyal fixed Tarsho even on the portion of the house belonging to Leela Chocho, a Muslim. Retaliating to the action she removed the flags and it gave rise to a big conflict. The incident was exploited at higher political level of Congress 'A' who charged that the Muslims had insulted the Buddhist religion by removing and destroying the Tarsho. The attention of the religious men, in position, was also drawn to this act and issue. Kushok Togdan of Phiang Gompa sent word to all prominent Ladakhis, through Buddhist Association Leh, that their flag had been insulted and that they should all assemble in Leh. Within a few days a large number of Buddhists, from various parts of Ladakh, gathered in Leh. They organised Dharna and procession in front of Collector's office and the market. The Buddhist Association put some demands, and wanted that they should urgently be met with. One of the demands was that those who insulted the Buddhist flag should immediately be turned out of Ladakh. When the demand was not met the mob took a violent turn and burnt down the Collectorate building. Among other demands, one was that the Ladakhis should be declared as Scheduled category. Another demand was that there should be a Ladakhi Minister in the Jammu and Kashmir Ministry. It was for Wangyal who, then, happened to be the Member of Legislative Assembly from Congress 'A'. The demand was acceded to and Wangyal prevailed upon the Buddhist Association to withdraw the agitation. The situation calmed down after the agitation strategy achieved its political motive, though it led to the creation of a rift between the Muslim and the Buddhist population. The old informants stated that this kind of disturbance, on communal basis, had never happened before in Ladakh. Because of a special kind of



manipulation the incident took place in spite of the fact that the Ladakhis, being Buddhists, primarily believe in nonviolence. They are, by religion, non-aggressive and tolerant. After this incident, which occurred in June 1969, the Congress 'B' got more support from Muslim population who got convinced that the matter was instigated by the supporters of Congress 'A'.

In 1971 Parliamentary election, too, the interested parties worked under the cover of religion and communal resource. Kushok Bakula was opposed by Sonam Wangdus. The latter was a member of Leh Congress Committee and comparatively little known. To start with, Congress 'B' put up Wangdus as a covering candidate. But ultimately he was left alone to contest against Kushok Bakula. Wangdus got a good support from Muslims of Kargil. Brij Bharadwaj (1971), a Hindustan Times correspondent, commented that though both candidates are Buddhists, religion is playing no less role in electioneering as Wangdus has been adopted by the people of Kargil where the number of Muslim electorate is about 23,000 out of a total of 27,000; while out of the total electorate of 25,000 in Leh Tehsil the number of Buddhists is about 22,000. Tension among Buddhists and Muslims in Leh and stoning of mosque are some issues which are being fully exploited by supporters of Wangdus who is depicted as saviour of mosque even though he is a Buddhist. The division between the two factions of the ruling party which began in 1965, was temporarily patched up early this year following the efforts of State party leaders. But these differences erupted again when Kushok Bakula was given the party mandate for Parliament. The two factions known as the Congress 'A' and Congress 'B', respectively draw their support from different areas. While the Congress 'A' which is supporting Kushok Bakula, is popular in Leh Tehsil, where Buddhists dominate; the Congress 'B' is popular in Kargil Tehsil where Shia Muslims are in a majority. Both factions also enjoy marginal support of the other communities, but the division between the two factions is largely on communal lines. Kushok Bakula again retained the parliamentary seat by defeating his lone rival, Sonam Wangdus. The remark given by Brij Bhardwaj of the Hindustan Times may be quoted in the context of this victory. The statement given by him, however, seems to be applicable only in a specific situation and for a short span. In the words of Bhardwaj, 'if one examines the polling pattern, it will be apparent that Ladakh district, which earlier could be hailed as an example of religious amity and friendly relations among different communities, has lost the distinction and has become a hot-bed of communal intrigues. For instance, when the votes at Kargil and Nurba were counted, Mr. Bakula was trailing behind by over 8,000 votes. These two areas are predominantly Muslim populated. When the counting was done at Leh and Zaskar, Mr. Bakula not only made up the deficit but also secured a winning margin. The bigger margin was possible because polling at Kargil, which is a predominantly Shia Muslim area, was 65 per cent against over 87 per cent in Leh Tehsil,

inhabited by Buddhist supporters of Mr. Bakula. The issues in the elections were not economic grievances or political but communal. The main political weapon used against Mr. Bakula by his opponent's was his role during the Buddhist agitation in Leh last year. They blamed him for the alleged stoning of a mosque in Leh during the agitation. Against this Mr. Sanam Wangdus, though a Buddhist, was hailed as saviour of the mosque'.



## Religious Attributes

The life and culture of Ladakhis is strongly religion-ridden. Religion is a dominant force and its manifestations are apparent in all the major aspects of Ladakhi social structure. It has been observed that the elements of religion provide incentive to the people to maintain status-quo in terms of traditional life. The religious contents, people believe, provide them security under the more difficult conditions. The religion in Ladakh cannot be discussed in isolation of social organisation, economic structure and political network. People remain highly obliged to religious men, and they favourably respond to the call of such people. What Moorcroft (1837) observed continues to hold true. He observed that Lamaism seems to be the dictator of their destinies, and the words of a Lama, however, inconsistent and unbelievable they may be to a man of common sense, are nevertheless law for him. People are under the sway of Lamas who act as their guides, advisers and liberators from sufferings. Anything concerning Gompa (solitary place or heritage), Kushoks, Lamas, Chomos and other associated religious men in hierarchy is uniformly respected. The social organisational set-up is so designed that the religious elements are difficult to be overlooked. So much so that a large number of families spare at least one member each to join the brotherhood of priests. Normally the youngest child from family is spared for the purpose. The person, so spared, devotes his life to religion and leads the life of celibacy. In some form or the other the religion helps meet the requirements of people. There is a great deal of interdependence between the people of secular and sacred hierarchies. The Gompa, with its force of religious-men, survives on the village society and vice-versa. For a disease, not easily cured through worship, the Kushok is consulted. After making his religious calculations the Kushok directs the needy to contact a particular Amchi or Lharje. The latter may or may not be a religious man. The Amchi, with the blessings of Kushok, treats the person. Many a times, the Kushok himself suggests for white-washing of Chorten to get rid off the disease.

Of how much significance the religion is to a Ladakhi is again shown by the religious institutions and places. Such existence is reported at family, village and regional levels. Almost every family has its own Chotkang, the family worship room. To be more accurate, it may be stated that out of 300 families, 234 have their Chotkangs. At village



level there is either a Vihara (a small form of Gompa) or Gompa where large scale worship is arranged. With this is attached the force of religious persons. A few villages, having small Viharas, then together recognise a Gompa as belonging to them. This is how the Ladakhis are linked to wider religious organizations and institutions. It may be mentioned that in addition to numerous Viharas there are thirtyfive Gompas in Ladakh. These include Hemis, Chemrey, Anle, Takthak, Thiksey, Stakmo, Deskit, Spituk, Sabu, Tok, Lekir, Karsha, Rangdum, Stongsdey, Lingshet, Stakna, Bardan, Zongkhal, Sgangnon, Lamayuru, Shachukul, Shang, Matho, Lhangna, Chumir, Rizong, Samtanling, Nyoma, Shey, Bazgo, Alchi, Mangyu, Sumia, Chikatan and Lingshet. Sixteen of these are more popular and the rest fall within their purview. They belong either to Red or the Yellow sect of Ladakhi Buddhism. The monastic institutions are in possession of large tracts of fertile land, depriving many others of land ownership. But still people have regard for Gompas and never consider them as centres of exploitation. This is because of their deep religious sentiments. As position of Lama is not hereditary, and as anybody can opt to become Lama, the monastic possessions are not at all envied. The bigger monasteries maintain library of religious books. They also house religious paintings, images of gods and goddesses and other objects of worship. There are scrolls which adorn the walls. The monastery has numerous rooms for Lamas and storage purpose. The Gompas are perched on high cliffs and their buildings look quite impressive. The Ladakhi art on metal, clay and cloth is well depicted in the Gompas. Prayer and worship hall is one of the important places in monastery. The sketches, portraits and statues of Lord Buddha and his disciples are arranged in this hall. In addition there are images drawn on walls and cloth. An open yard, within Gompa campus, is an important place in each monastery. It is surrounded by buildings with projecting balconies. In this open yard the Lamas arrange dances and plays. The spectators are also accommodated in the same space. A large number of windows provide light and majestic appearance to the monastery. In a monastery the space for various category of Lamas are defined. The Kushok stays in a room at the top, adjacent to the prayer hall. At slightly lower elevation to Kushok's room are the rooms of other senior Lamas. At the lowest elevation of Gompa campus are the rooms meant for beginner Lamas. Why the Gompas are built at higher elevation has its own background. Religious performances being most important in Ladakhi life are not to be disturbed by any noise. At the same time their sacred identity is also to be maintained. The Ladakhis are of the opinion that these two requirements are easily met by having monastery at higher elevation.

Gompa is a big repository of cultural heritage of the Bhotos. Their art is depicted through multicoloured paintings, representing designs of various kinds including human figures, animals, temples, flowers etc. Numerous designs with lines, circles and dots can also be marked. Like-



wise the plastic and graphic arts, found in Buddhist monasteries, are of a high order. Sculpture and engraving works on stone, metal and baked clay speak of their high standard of art. These art pieces are nicely designed and arranged. The Ladakhi tables and wooden pillars are also engraved. Dancing costumes, masks and dramatic performances are rare preservation of art. There are various kinds of musical instruments kept in Gompa. The common Ladakhis are of the opinion that in the absence of monasteries a great deal of their cultural heritage would be lost. The famous religious plays, depicting various aspects of Ladakhi culture, are organized by the Gompa people. The cultural transmission among Ladakhis is, to a great extent, done through the religious men and the religious institutions. A big display of music, dance, drama and mystery plays is done in the Gompas as part of celebration of Gompa festivals. How much faith Ladakhis have in religion can be assessed from Gompa festivals. I participated in the annual fair of Hemis Gompa and found that thousands of Ladakhis, men, women and children, had come for worship, as also to observe the cultural heritage. The devil dances were arranged and the same were meaningful to the Ladakhis. Demonology and Lamaism are found prevalent. In addition to Chotkang and Gompa, there are Chortens and Manes, the popular religious structures. On some of the rocks one can observe gigantic figures of god or goddess. Likewise there are Gonchungs found in large number of villages. Gonchungs is a small form of monastery consisting of only one room. It is headed by a Lama or two. They are governed by the rules of bigger monastery in near vicinity.

There is a great deal of reciprocity between the religious organisations (Gompa and its men) and the village community. Many a times the relationship involves obligation. Neither the community nor the monastic organisation treat their role as burden. Gompa people preach religion to the Ladakhis. The preachings also help them to be honest and non-violent. They perform various kinds of worship which are believed to provide protection to the people. The big hall of Gompa is also used for the purpose. Ladakhi life is worship-ridden, and it is through worship that they seek solution to most of their problems. Thirdly, the Gompa men direct the commoners to observe better principles and to uphold good deeds in life. The Kushok would forecast the ill-luck and other undesirable events. The villagers take care of the same through the prescribed worship. The feeling that the Ladakhis thrive well under the blessings of religious men creates necessity of worship. Blessings are offered through worship. In secular aspects too the role is no less important. On many occasions Chang-jot is taken help of for seeking decisions. His words have sufficient say and are respected. Then the Gompa institution gives loans, in cash and kind, to the Ladakhis. Any villager can borrow grain, Sattu, money, wood etc., from Gompa. In addition the religious men form a strong medium of cultural transmission. The sacred trees are declared by the Lamas, and the same are not to be cut,



They are protected against damage by the animals. The safety of such trees is believed to be helpful to the human beings and the animals. Likewise the site for house construction is approved by the Lama who, after consulting the sacred book, approves or disapproves of the site. He tells whether the site, proposed to be chosen for house construction, is free of evil spirits or not. In case of a death the Lama decides the number of days for which the dead body is to be retained in the house.

In response to what Gompa and its men do for the community, the villagers offer free service in various forms. For any new construction in Gompa campus, or one made in the name of Gompa, the villagers help outrightly. They provide wood, brick and labour. The religious hierarchy need not bother about men and material which are all available free. Similarly the agriculture fields, belonging to Gompa, are looked after, for all purpose, by the villagers. Those engaged in this task get free meals for the day. In case the Gompa land has been rented out to some villagers, a part of the produce goes to the real cultivator. The rest goes to Gompa. Featherstone has also stated that the Lamas are generally dependent on the population for contributions, thus laying a heavy burden on the people. These gifts are frequently in kind—butter, salt, meat and livestock—this being much preferred to money. During the harvesting season, Lamas are told to go round and collect grant for their monasteries. Then the Lamas manufacture images and charms which are sold at a good profit and large fees are charged by them for supplying horoscopes for marriages and many other occasions. On the occasion of every worship, as also otherwise, when Lamas happen to visit any family, they are offered food and Gur Gur. Whenever required the labour force is supplied by the villagers to work for Gompa. They may be engaged in carrying water, fuel or any other thing to Gompa. Some help from non-Lamas is always sought in Gompa kitchen. The Goba deposes, by rotation, the villagers to work in Gompa kitchen. Those, in Spituk, who cannot spare a man from family depute Tsering Dorje for the purpose. Dorje is a landless labourer and stays near Gompa. One engaging Dorje has to give 4 Khal of wheat for the term. In addition, Dorje gets meals from Gompa.

Although the religion continues to dominate Ladakhi way of life, and the people largely depending upon it, some have expressed that a few of the religious persons have lately started drifting from their ideal norms and positions. According to these the trend now is from Chomo to Pomo. Chomo is the nun, a religious female, and Pomo refers to a married female and house-wife their point of stress is that the Chomos, who are to lead a life of celibacy, have also started marrying. There are a few factors in support of Lamas and Chomos deviation from the life of celibacy. Economic reason is one of them. Because of the increased opportunities for employment and labour job some of the religious men and women feel that they can be self-supporting. They can survive without depending upon Gompa. Under such condition they feel like



marrying and having family life. Economic compulsion as a factor to promote Lamahood and Chomohood, is less strong under the changing conditions. Simultaneously the attraction for worldly life has increased, more so for fancy goods lately popularised in Ladakh. The greed of married life is towards rise among the religious persons; a trend traditionally not approved for them. Sometimes the condition of celibacy bears hard on the religious persons. For increasing sexual desires some of them decide to give up the religious life. The trend has given a setback to the position of religious persons. All put together the religious circle is getting shaky. Occasional conflict among Lamas is adding fuel to the fire.

### Religion in Ladakh

Gannhars (1956) have reported that the later-day Buddhism, with its art and cultural traditions, did pass from Kashmir to China and Tibet; and it happened through Ladakh only. Fa Hien (400 A. D.) also reported of some Buddha relics. Cunningham supported this view-point while mentioning that one of these relics (the alms-bowl) still exists in a temple to the north of Le (Leh). The holy tooth, another relic, was believed to be carried away by Ali Sher when the Musalmans from west plundered Ladakh. The Chinese pilgrim also made mention of revolving prayer cylinder and the monks in Ladakh. Still some controversy remains about the introduction of Buddhism in Ladakh. According to Cunningham it was introduced in the time of Ashoka. Gannhars have, however, not agreed with it and they are of the opinion that "Buddhism had found its way into Ladakh and the adjoining areas before the time of the great Indian Emperor. We have seen how Buddhism was one of the living faiths in the valley in the time of Surrendra. One of the Viharas which the first Buddhist ruler of Kashmir erected was at Saurasa (present day Suru) beyond the Zojila. Obviously Buddhism must either have been prevalent in the territory or was introduced into it in the time of Surrendra, to make him found a monastery there. Later, in Ashoka's time when Buddhism spread widely in Kashmir and other territories, it is only reasonable to assume that monks in greater numbers crossed into Ladakh and Gilgit from Kashmir and Gandhara to spread the faith more extensively" (Gannhar 1956:175).

Buddhism of Ladakh is a mixture of Bon, the old religion of Tibet, Tantrism and Mahayana. Some have also referred Lamaism as the religion of Ladakhis. The chief concept of their divinity is defined under three dimensions, that is, Gautama Buddha (Sangyas), religious principles inculcated by Buddha (Chhos Kon chok) and the Lamas following these principles (Gendun Kon chok). Demonology and idolatry are the other traits found in the religion among Ladakhis are believed to be the outcome of Bon or Pon religion. The prevalence of mystic doctrines is still marked. Although Buddhism is now the prevailing faith, the Lada-



khis still worship and make offerings to some old divinities, such as gods of hills, fields, tree, water etc. The accounts of evil spirits and traces of sacrifice are also found among the Bhotos. There is great deal of Tantrism, the activities. Under Tantric Buddhism the techniques, defined, are used for utilizing good and evil things. Power is gained by the manipulation of good and evil forces. Some take Tantrism as decadent form of Buddhism, and it has been so owing more to ancient Bon religion of Tibet, and also shamanism and animism. The Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism) which has largely influenced Ladakhi Buddhism is, as stated by Sven Hedin (1910), only a corrupt form of Buddhism, and under an outward varnish of Buddhistic symbolism has incorporated a number of Sivaistic elements and has also retained the superstitions which in pre-Buddhistic times found expression in wild Tantrical devil dances, rites and sacrifices. The object of these ceremonies was to exercise, banish and propitiate the powerful demons which reign everywhere, in the air, on the earth and in water and whose only function is to plague, torture and persecute the children of men. In spite of the principle, "not to kill", the monks eat meat and make use of goat's blood in certain religious rites. Lamaism has absorbed many of the traits of Bon religion.

Among the offerings made to the gods and goddesses, the important ones are bowls full of water, grain, butter incense and lighted wicks. Normally the bowls are placed in two rows. Another common offering is a figure made out of butter and dough. It is at times mixed with red pigment. While pointing on such figures John Blofeld (1970) has again shown connection with Bon practices. He has stated that these figures are shaped in different ways for different categories of deities, each shape having its esoteric significance. Tormas (these figures) are probably among the externals which Tibetan Buddhism inherited from the ancient Bon religion.

Besides Buddhism, with traces of other religions, some of the Ladakhis have adopted Islamic and Christian faiths. Many Ladakhi girls have married Muslims and consequently embraced Islam. Because of the efforts of Moravian Christian missionaries, some Ladakhis have become Christians. Change of religion, for a Ladakhi, is nothing serious and they do not take much time to do that. There is no serious community reaction to change of religion. Sometimes two real brothers and their families, with different religious background, are found living in the same house. That way the Buddhists have all along been tolerant.

It may be mentioned that Captain Featherstone (1926) spoke of the Lamaism as dominant religious faith in Ladakh. According to Featherstone the Lamaism of Western Tibet extended beyond. Lama is a Tibetan word meaning "superior one", its use was formally restricted to the head of the Lamasery, and strictly speaking, it is applicable only to abbots and the highest monks, though out of courtsey it is now used for almost all monks and priests. In Ladakh, they have power and influence in every possible phase and walk of life with the result that it is the most



priest-ridden place in the world. The Lamas are good natured men. Their education consists in committing to memory the sacred word, and prayers of Buddha, which are in many cases unintelligible to themselves. Before Lamaism, two earlier religions flourished in Ladakh—Bonchos and Buddhism—many features of both of these being embodied in the present day Lamaism. The Bon religion dates from time immemorial in Tibet and the neighbouring territory, and is described by Waddell as “animistic”, devil dancing, or shamanist,. It flourished in Western Tibet from the earliest times down to 1300 A.D., when it practically died out, though much of its ritual and demonology was absorbed by Buddhism and later by Lamaism. Buddhism was introduced into Western Tibet as early as 200 B.C. Besides the introduction of Buddhism from India by the Mons tribe, it was also brought from the West by the tribe of Dards from Gilgit. The inhabitants being mostly nomads it became essential to provide centres of Buddhist teaching by founding monasteries. More colonists came, and around these religious settlements, villages sprang up. Towards the beginning of eleventh century, the religion known as Lamaism had come from Central Tibet and was favoured by a line of kings of Ladakh, who did everything to promote it.

### Religious sects

In Ladakh there are two distinct religious sects; one is known as Red and the other as Yellow. Some of the monasteries belong to Red and others to the Yellow sect. In the initial stage there were no such divisions in the religion of Ladakhis. These developed later on. Nyimapa was the earliest sect and its religious men wore red dresses. Gelukpa (the virtuous) sect was originated around the middle of 14th century by Tsongkhapa, and its religious persons wear yellow dresses. The disciples of Tsongkhapa are known as Yellow Hats. They distinguished from the Red Hats of the past. The background of its formation is provided by certain principles and their nature of observance. The feeling of inferiority or superiority between the followers of two sects is not marked apparently, though some people hold the superiority of one over the other. It has further been reported that Yellow sect Lamas represent Henayana or little vehicle while the Red sect Lamas represent Mahayana or great vehicle. Henayana and Mahayana are the two subdivisions in Buddhism.

It has been reported that the religious persons of Yellow sect take more care of the religious prohibitions and sanctions. Some laxity is reported in case of those who follow Red sect. For instance the carriers of Red sect can, at times, even marry and are allowed to drink Chang. The same are, however, forbidden for Yellow sect priests. People explain that the Red sect preaches that the world is an illusion. It also speaks for equality. The Yellow sect demands doing good to all. It also recommends for equality. Featherstone writes that to introduce his sect in Western



Tibet, Tsongkhapa, sent an embassy about 1400 A.D. The two ascetics went to Leh. The king gave command: At today's council, whoever attends, be it ascetic or a low caste man, Bheda, Mon, or shoemaker, he should not be refused admittance. The two ascetics made over the present to the king who was delighted with it. This made the king build several more monasteries; these followed the new doctrine, in consequence of which many existing monasteries exchanged the old doctrine for the new. Tsongkhapa's sect eventually became the established church of Lamaism.

Though there is some difference in the principles observed by the followers of two sects, they do not maintain distance among themselves. The Lamas of the two sects meet each other and participate together in certain major worships. They can go to each other's monastery and perform worship. Even Kushoks can participate in such performances. On some occasion, the Lamas from different monasteries (belonging to Red as well as Yellow sect) gather in one Gompa to recite the sacred text of Kanjur (Shah-Hger) and Tanjur (Stan-Hgyur). The former consists of about 108 volumes and the latter of 225 volumes. The philosophical teachings of the two are also not different. The Lamas of the two sects are compromising. But if there is some instigation the difference flare up. For instance a serious conflict arose after provocation of trainee Lamas by some non-religious and religious elements. It happened in Buddhist School of Philosophy, Leh, where the trainee Lamas from Red and Yellow sects came to a clash. The incident created ill-will. The training in Buddhist philosophy was started in Leh school after 1959 when Tibet borders were sealed. In 1968-69, the students from two sects clashed and resorted to beating of each other. So much so that separate prayers had to be arranged for the members of each sect. The trainees of one sect refused to learn from a teacher belonging to other sect. Efforts were then made for reconciliation. The tension minimised but the relations could not be revived to original cordiality.

That the Red sect gives more freedom to its Lamas could be made clear by the people of Kuyul. The narration relates to a Lama, incharge of Kuyul Vihara. Nawang Pulzor, a Lama, is the present incharge of Kuyul Vihara. He hails from Henley where his father Tashi Palla lives. Out of four children of Tashi Palla, Pulzor opted to become Lama. He was the youngest of all and became Lama at the age of twenty. Nawang, Drotten, his master, made him Lama and gave him religious training (including reading, writing and dramatics) for about 12 years in Henley Gompa. Later on he was made incharge of Kuyul Vihara. But soon after he got married. His position of priest and incharge of Vihara remained undisturbed. The Red sect contained him in Lamasery. The villagers continue to pay him the same respect though he got married. He continues to perform all sorts of worship. Pulzor has been granted cultivable land, worth six Batti, by Henley Gompa. He is now 40 years old and functions as a Red sect Lama, though having a wife, one year



old son and six year old daughter. Pulzor has lately decided to form one of his sons as Lama.

For the religious persons of Yellow-robed sect there are comparatively more inhibitions. They, under the force of religion, are required to observe abstinence from sex. The Lamas of this sect would not commit adultery and are not supposed to indulge in killing, stealing, drinking and smoking. No animal would ever be slaughtered by these Lamas. They would not eat meat in Gompa campus. To keep up feeling of equality is another important feature of the men of this sect. While in Gompa the Lamas eat one meal a day. A large part of their time is spent in meditation.

### Religious beliefs and worship

In the religion-dominated community of the Ladakhis there is a strong religious belief system. Some elements of the latter confine to the religious dimensions alone. There are others having implications in non-religious arena. In this context the cylindrical prayer wheel of the Ladakhis carries lot of importance. There are few forms of this prayer wheel. One is rotated while holding in the hand. And the Ladakhis are seen rotating it more often. They do so even while walking, or talking to some one. There are other wheels which are fixed in the walls, especially in Gompa campus. A passer-by rotates them with the pressure of hands. There are still others, the bigger ones, being operated by the force of flow of water. These prayer wheels are fixed near the water channels. The wheels contain sacred literature, especially the Mantra "Om Mane Padame Hum", written on the papers. This coiled sacred literature rotates with the motion of the wheel. A broadly accepted belief is that more one rotates the wheel, the more religious merit he/she gets. Every rotation is equated to the uttering of sacred Mantras contained inside the wheel. The religious merit would be more when the rotation frequency is more. Rotating the prayer wheel is also believed to help remove sins.

Belief in achieving religious merit is again expressed through Chortens and Manes, the two religious structures. A Chorten is pagoda-like structure and is constructed to hide the ashes—remain of the cremated person. After the dead body of a superior or good man is cremated, its remains are mixed with clay. Small models are carved out of this paste. These are, at times, stamped with a Buddha image. They are then placed inside the Chorten and the structure is raised over it. Some people throw the ashes—remains in rivers or on the top of hills. Sometimes the sacred literature left behind by the dead person is also kept in the Chorten. The formation of Chortens is towards decline. People do not find time to do it. It is now built only in case of a few superior persons. Some of the old Chortens are in a dilapidated condition. Some rich men may build a Chorten even when there is no death in his house. This may be



done on the advice of Lama. These structures are, by and large, kept in good condition, nicely plastered with clay or at times whitewashed and coloured. The Chortens vary in size, though the shape almost remains uniform. Kagani is a kind of Chorten raised above the ground and supported on two sidewalls. It contains some clay figures. Some of the precious things are kept inside Kagani. While passing under it the villagers touch Kagani with their heads to achieve religious merit. The villagers, and not the Lamas, prepare Kagani. The latter is not built after the death of anyone. The Manes are long and massive stone walls. One would come across Manes while approaching a village. These are also located anywhere on the way, or even within the village boundaries. There is a great variation in the size of the Manes. In height it may be from 4 to 6 feet; in width from 5 to 10 feet, and in length from a few yards to a few furlongs. On many of the stones, forming Mane, are the engravings and inscriptions of sacred hymns. More popular of these are "Om Mane Padme Hum" and "Om Vajra Pani Hum". On some of the stones are made images of Buddha and other gods and goddesses.

"Om Mane Padme Hum" is the most common religious Mantra found on the stones of Mane. The repetition of this Mantra is common among the Ladakhis. In spite of so much popularity of the hymn, most of the Ladakhis are not in a position to explain the exact meaning involved. However, what Tyndale Biscoe (1971) explains holds true at wider level. Accordingly the Mantra means "O God of the jewel on the Lotus", or as it has been interpreted to me: "May my soul, O God, be like the jewel of water which lies on the lips of the lotus leaf just as it is going to fall into the lake and be lost in the ocean of water (*i.e.*, be lost in Nirvana)." In case of Mane the religious merit goes to those who put stones on it, as also to those who keep it towards right while passing by its side. Captain Featherstone (1926) has also stated that many of the Ladakhis translate Om Mani Padmi Hong as addressed to Buddha, thus "Oh thou who dwellest in the lotus leaf" or "O jewel in the lotus, thus may he be, Amen." When Featherstone visited Ladakh, the Manes were still more popular. While writing on them, he has stated that at the ends of a Mane wall there are frequent structures called Chortens, though at times the latter are seen quite above. They are built on a large square pedestal, which is surmounted by whitewashed stones. On the top is generally a small wooden globe supported by a pole, varying in size. Just in the outskirts of Leh; on way to Hemis, is a very big Mane. Featherstone described it as the longest Mane, with a Chorten at each end. It was built by Deldon, a king who reigned between 1620 and 1640. The religious belief in regard to Chortens and Manes is again more or less akin to one explained in the context of cylindrical prayer wheel. Whenever the Ladakhis come across a Chorten or Mane, they would always pass by its side while keeping the structure towards right side, even if they have to cover more distance. Many of them would even take a few rounds of it if they are not in hurry. So doing would not only remind them of the religion but also would help



them achieve more religious merit. One round of the structure is believed to repeat the sacred Mantra as many times as the Mantra written on the stones forming the structure. At the same time these structures are believed to remind of religion to the Ladakhis. Those who do not pay heed to such structures are, it is believed, bound to be harmed in this as well as in the later life. In this connection it may be pointed out that Tundup of Spituk suffered from paralysis after he removed a part of Mane from in-front of his house. Now aged about 50, Tundup committed this act some 13 years back and since then suffering from paralysis. Later on he got a new Mane made. But it did not help him. It may, however, be pointed out that Chortens and Manes can be shifted to other sites after performing Archok worship. After this worship the structures can be demolished and made again at the desired site.

It has been reported that out of Chortens and Manes, the former are older. The origin of Chorten is explained in relation to Buddha. For his various actions the Chortens were built. We, thus find enlightenment Chorten, victory heads Chorten, defeating the evil spirit Chorten and five heads and many heads Chorten. These Chortens were further built after the death of enlightened people. The kings got the Manes built in the memory of their fathers. Some criminals, as part of punishment, helped build Manes. Every Gompa, the chief repository of Ladakhi religion, celebrates its annual festival. Thousands of Ladakhis, irrespective of their sect, came to participate. A common belief is that the worship on this occasion helps avoid calamity on the people and land of Ladakh.

The Ladakhis believe in rebirth and the soul, for them, never dies. When a Kushok dies a search is made for his substitute. Formerly the task was given to the chief Lama of Lhasa. He found the reincarnate. The Chief Lama would tell of the direction, place and family where the Kushok had taken rebirth. The Lamas of the concerned monastery used to act accordingly and searched the new born. The informants further expressed that the Chief Lama of Lhasa could tell of certain other identification marks. The description of the house and the human beings and animals thereof could also be given. The Lamas located the place as well as the infant. A few of the belongings of late Kushok mixed with some others were then kept before the infant. If the child touched any of the articles, belonging to Kushok, it was confirmed that he is reincarnation. Since then, he got the treatment given to a Kushok. The belief of the Ladakhi, in this context, does not end here itself. If somehow the rebirth was delayed the Lamas geared up their worship frequency for early reappearance of Kushok in human form.

One of the ways of achieving religious merit is the counting of beads of a rosary. All Lamas, and many others, possess such rosaries and keep on counting the beads, accompanied by the murmuring of "Om Mane Padme Hum". The rosaries also speak of Ladakhi religious devotion. Some Ladakhis can be seen wearing rosary on their wrist and in the neck,



Corresponding to the number of Kangur volumes, the beads also number 108. The more the counting of beads, the more is the religious merit. John Blofeld (1970) has explained that the number of beads in rosary, as hundred and eight, is borrowed from ancient India and is said to correspond to some heavenly bodies of special importance in astrology. In practice, each set of a hundred and eight repetitions is counted as a hundred and the remaining eight thrown in for good measure in case some beads have inadvertently slipped through the devotee's hand. Rosaries can be of any suitable substance but more favoured kind are those made of so called Bodhi seeds. Another religious belief of the Ladakhis is in regard to the Buddhist flags (Tarchoks), so popularly seen all around. Such Buddhist flags are always having some hymns printed on them. The flags can specially be noted, waving in large number, on the roofs of the houses and monasteries, as also on Chortens, Manes and other religious structures. In fact, Tarchoks form one of the most notable items of Buddhist in Ladakh. Such flags are generally prepared by the Lamas and supplied, on demand, to the general public. The religious men suggest to install such flags. The flags are square in shape and are fixed, when in large number, along a thin rope. The flags are installed in normal course as well as in difficulty when suggested by the religious men. In both the cases the belief is that installation of flags brings religious merit to those who instal them. The wind causes waving of flags alongwith religious inscriptions on them. Such a waving is believed to add to the religious merit. The more the waving, the more the religious achievement. In order that such flags may wave faster they are usually installed at points comparatively higher in elevation. An added belief is that the attainment of religious merit helps conquer forces of destruction. Tarchoks are also installed in the interest of religion. The belief is that the waving of flags helps expand the religion. With the wind the Buddhism is likely to spread to all the world. Similar to Tarchok is Turchen, an additional medium to achieve religious merit. Turchen is a structure consisting of a big wooden pole fixed in front of the house. The pole is wrapped with multicoloured pieces of cloth printed with sacred hymns. These cloth pieces wave in the air causing religious merit to those who installed them.

The Ladakhis are terribly scared of evil spirits and ghosts. They have devised various means of protection against them. One of these is Chan which refers to various kinds of paintings made on the outer surface of walls of the house. The paintings are made by the Ladakhis with striking colours. The front wall of the house is specially preferred for Chan. Most of the sketches are represented with dotted designs prepared out of red ochre. Human figures carrying swords are also drawn. One also finds animal figures and crossed squares and rectangles. The paintings are initially made after the house is constructed. They are redone whenever people find them fading. These paintings are not meant for decoration but serve as protection against evil spirits. The inmates



of the house are believed to be protected from evil spirits after the formation of Chan.

There are some popular beliefs in regard to the abode of benevolent and malevolent supernaturals. A commonly accepted view is that their abode is in stones, hillocks, trees and water sources, specially springs. Common abode of Lhu (a malevolent spirit) is the spring, though it is also reported to stay on a tree called Lharchang. The Ladakhis regard this tree as sacred. In regard to such a tree there are certain considerations. The tree is to be respected like Mane and Chorten. While passing by the side of this tree, the Ladakhis keep it towards right, a respectable act. No branch or any other part of this tree is cut or burnt. Even if this tree has fallen because of wind or erosion it is not to be cut or taken away. Its wood is not to be used for any purpose. Rather, the tree is worshipped. Sabdakh (very small species of lizard) is said to be another abode of Lhu. It is never killed and instead provided protection. When one comes across a dead Sabdakh he approaches Lama or Onpo to get the suspected danger avoided. If need be a worship is arranged for the purpose. Further, there are some who opine that the supernaturals change their abode. In this context an interesting case has been cited by the people of Spituk. How sudden technological change reacted to this aspect of Ladakhi social structure is revealed in the case. While constructing the Leh airfield some of the rocks at the back of Spituk Gompa were broken. This was done to avoid obstruction in the landing and take off of aircrafts. But to Ladakhis these rocks were the abode of supernaturals. When the rocks were broken the supernaturals got annoyed and consequently caused aircrash of Packet plane. This is how the Ladakhis explained the cause of aircrash. They attributed it to the anger of supernaturals. The villagers further explained that it was after the breaking of these rocks that more and faster winds started blowing. These not only caused damage to the crops but also created hindrance to the landing and take off of aircrafts. In the background of such explanations a large scale worship was organised to appease the supernaturals and to shift their abode to other convenient rocks. Such religious performance pacified the supernaturals who gradually calmed down. Lhustor is the main worship to appease Lhu and it can help cause smooth shifting from one place to another. Lamas perform this worship and can control Lhu.

Another incident of similar nature could be reported by the Ladakhis of Spituk. Looking to the difficulty of drinking water the concerned officials of the government proposed to deepen the water source (spring) in Spituk village. They also decided to widen the source so that more water can be contained in it. As such the work was started on one of the springs some six years back. Within a few days of the start of work the persons working on it suffered from skin disease, causing severe itching and rashing. The Amchi failed to cure them. When Chanspa was consulted he gave amulets to the victims to get them cured. Chanspa told that the disease was caused by Lhu, the spirit living in the spring.



The patients gradually recovered but the work could not be completed. All refused to work. Because of their strong belief in religion the Ladakhis would not easily participate in any development work where their gods, goddesses and spirits are adversely affected.

Even in normal course every Ladakhi family would arrange for Lhu worship at least once a year. I attended this worship in the house of Tsering Phunchok, a Peon in the Buddhist School of Philosophy. He invited five Lamas for the purpose. A figure of Lhu was curved out of Sattu and kept in Chotkang where worship was going on. The worship continued till the afternoon of the same day. After it was over Phunchok carried, followed by the Lamas operating on flutes, the Lhu figure to Indus river flowing nearby. After throwing the figure in river water all of them returned. It is believed that Lhu gets appeased after the organisation of this worship. Further the worship ensures protection against diseases.

Some of the Ladakhis beliefs bear close relationship with the religious elements and occurrences. As part of their belief system the villagers explain that eating of meat and drinking of Chang are considered inauspicious on the worship days, that is, on 8th, 15th and 30th of every Ladakhi month. Likewise the consumption of these articles is forbidden in the first month of each Tibetan calendar year. Some have even stated that the food is to be taken on alternate days during this month. Likewise the eating of fish is taboo on religious ground. One would invite sin while ignoring the above prohibitions. And to avoid the same the religious impositions are respected.

The religious beliefs of the Ladakhis are again represented through the structures of Lhato and Samgo-Namgo. Lhato is a rectangular structure, closed from three sides. It is made of mud walls, about six to seven feet high, covered by the projecting roof. The structure is generally built near a Gompa. Sometimes the structure is seen decorated with sacred flags and yak horns. When a person commits sin he/she, if so desired, comes to Lhato to seek pardon for the wrong doing. While seeking pardon the person fixes some sacred flags on the structure. A broadly accepted belief is that a person's prayers are communicated to the main gods and goddesses of Gompa through Lhato. And when a request reaches Buddha, through Lhato, the person is pardoned. One approaches Lhato because the worship room of Gompa does not always remain open. Lhato is, however, approachable all the time. The procedure establishes the fact that the biggest religious institution of Gompa maintains links with smaller religious structures. There is no isolation of mini religious structures from the giant religious structure. The mini structures, so popular in Ladakhi villages, have their respective importance in the broader religious framework.

The belief of the Ladakhis in ghosts and spirits further seeks strength through the recognition and formation of Samgo-Namgo. The details of Samgo-Namgo have already been given in the earlier narrations.



Samgo-Namgo is formed to keep away the evil spirits and ghosts. As per Ladakhis belief the ghosts and spirits do not dare to enter into the house when Samgo-Namgo is there. The inmates of the house, thus, remain safe. Indirectly it provides protection against diseases which are caused by the evil spirits and the ghosts. The inmates are specially protected from Chatka, a sudden attack of evil spirit causing sickness. The worship for Samgo-Namgo is occasionally arranged. Samgo-Namgo provides a special protection to the livestock. The fixing of goat skull, as part of structure, hints at the same. It ensures prosperity of animal wealth. The figure is prepared by Lama or Labha. Some hold the belief that Samgo-Namgo is useful in begetting children. The explanation is that in the absence of Samgo-Namgo, the evil spirit may get into the house and cause abortion, miscarriage etc. Such chances are minimised after having Samgo-Namgo. And hence better chance for child birth.

In spite of a strong protection mechanism the Ladakhis get adversely affected by evil spirits and ghosts. And the relief is then sought through worship. It is widely believed that Lhuchas, a worship, is extremely helpful in the matter. A Lama tells when a person is under the influence of evil spirit or ghost. Such an influence can also be confirmed by the Chanspa who usually lives in Chhamaskang, a small structure away from Gompa. While performing Lhuchas a devil figure is prepared. As soon as the worship is over the devil figure is thrown in river or any other water source. This, it is believed, removes the influence of evil spirit, especially of Lhu. For certain diseases the cure is sought through worship. For instance Chhasum, a worship, is organised to get rid off the eye trouble. Only one Lama does it for about an hour. Another popular religious belief is in regard to the paintings suggested by Onpo or Lama, and prepared by Spon. The Thankas (paintings), including Lhaskal and Skistak, are believed to serve definite purpose. The formation of Lhaskal is believed to ensure better future. Its formation also sounds of difficulties in future life. Simultaneously are suggested the ways to safely overcome them. Likewise people believe that Skistak helps in getting a better rebirth. In order that a person may be reborn in some better category the formation of Skistak is suggested. The belief in religious paintings is so widely popular that all the families are found in possession of them. The Ladakhis make cash payment for their formation.

The worship, known as Yarne, has two important functions. Yarne is organised every summer in Gompa hall. This worship is of long duration and continues for month and a half. It starts every morning and closes in the evening. During this performance the Lamas, as an imposition, do not move beyond Gompa campus. Primarily the worship is educative to the Lamas in terms of the details of this important event. In addition, there is another background of this worship. The Ladakhis express that lot of ants and insects come out on the surface in summer season. If Lamas move out they may kill them under their feet. That would bring curse to them. To avoid such killing of ants and insects the



worship is organised in summer. The Lamas, under the religious prohibition do not move out of monastery during the period of worship. The villagers do not participate in this worship. On this occasion they are simply engaged for other jobs like supplying water, fuel and other articles.

The Lamas as well as the Ladakhis are very scared of sin and they see that it is not ordinarily committed. Even if it is unintentionally done they have designed the remedy to seek relief. One of such means is Shojong, a worship. It is performed on the last day of a Tibetan month. The worship is exclusively meant for Lamas and they participate in it collectively. Performance of Shojong grants pardon to Lamas for their wrongs, doings and sins. Pardon is sought for the wrong deeds. In addition it helps achieve blessings for future. The worship keeps on reminding Lamas for not committing wrong deeds. Another occasion of celebration and worship is Losar, the new year day of the Ladakhis. Losar is observed according to the Tibetan calendar year. It is reported that the celebration of Losar, in the beginning of February, is done to remember Buddha's victory over the six heresies, the victory of true religion over infidelity. It also signifies the passing phase of cold weather. The worship, for two to three days, is done to celebrate the new year. The Ladakhis, in general, feel that Losar is the best occasion to pay respect and regard to the senior Lamas, including the Kushok. And once it is done in the beginning of the year they may keep it up all the year round. The junior Lamas offer Khataks to senior Lamas, thereby recognising their superiority. The villagers, too, offer Khatak to Lamas. And all the villagers and Lamas offer Khataks to the Kushok. These rituals are indication of mutual love and affection. The celebration marks good luck and prosperity for the coming year. In addition to worship the villagers and Lamas wear new clothes. Music, dances and horse race are organised. Chhagjot offers food to the villagers, symbolising them as their own people whose welfare is to be looked after by them.

Like Samgo-Namgo the Ladakhis believe in amulets which have the quality of curing disease and extending protection. Prepared by Lamas the amulets and other sacred wears help keep away the evil influence of supernatural powers. Chantho is a red-coloured amulet, narrow at one end and wide at the other. Towards the wide portion are attached a few small-sized stones or beads. Chantho is specially prepared for the infants and children who are made to tie it in their neck. Chantho contains sacred hymns written on small pieces of paper. These are tightly bundled and kept inside the metal frame of the amulet. The force of this sacred literature helps give protection to the child. In return of Chantho the Lama is paid one to two rupees. Sunha is another object which is believed to provide protection against the evil spirits and the sickness caused by them. Sunha resembles the sacred thread of the Hindus and is worn in the neck. For the preparation of Sunha a Lama is again paid in cash. The amount may vary from one to two rupees.



Sunha cures madness and sleeplessness. Chantho and Sunha are worn by the women to beget children. A woman also wears it prior to her delivery so that she can get a male child. While preparing Shonga (Sung Dud), a Lama murmurs some hymns and exhales with force. There is believed to be power in Lama's breath. Shonga is another amulet prepared by the Lamas and used for the same purpose as Chantho and Sunha. It is also worn in the neck. Kushok too prepare the amulets. The supernatural background of sickness and cure continues to go strong. The following table gives an account of the causes of disease.

**Table showing the causes of sickness as given by the Ladakhis**

Sl. No.	Disease causing factors	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Supernatural	159	53.00
2	Physical	30	10.00
3	Climatic	66	22.00

Out of 300 respondents, 45 informed that they do not know the cause of sickness. Among those who responded the majority stated that the diseases are largely caused by the supernatural forces followed, in order, by the climatic and the physical reasons. All the supernaturals are not responsible for sickness; there are some known for it. The Ladakhis cannot easily afford to ignore them.

The belief in traditional ways is, at times, so strong that it overpowers the content of modernity. During the course of my first visit to Spituk I suddenly heard the sound of gong music coming from one of the houses. I requested the Cultural Officer, who accompanied me to the village, to take me to the site of music. We got into the house which belonged to Ishae Shang, a Ladakhi, who had arranged a worship. One of Ishae's sons, an M.B.B.S. doctor, was present in the house. This son worked as Medical Officer in Jammu and Kashmir Government and was, in those days, on leave. The doctor entertained me with tea and biscuits. After talking for some time I requested the doctor to take me to Chotkang, the family worship room. I set quietly in the room for some time and expressed my regards for gods and goddesses therein. Later on I was told that the worship was arranged for Lhu who, after being satisfied, would help cure the sick person in the house. The doctor himself was a party to the worship. He did it under the dominance of parents, though professionally he had different views about the sickness.

The Ladakhis further believe that the worship of gods and goddesses on the auspicious days is bound to give religious merit. This is in addition to other practices meant for the same purpose. The more the religious

merit, the better would be the after-death phase. There are four auspicious days in a month. These include Chhaspar Gyat or Chhapogat (8th day), Chishu or Shiju (10th day), Chhaspa Chonga or Seba Chonga (15th day) and Namgang (30th or last day of the month). Except on 10th day, the worshippers keep fast for the whole day and eat food only in the late night around twelve o'clock. The Yangnus (worshippers on fast) do not even talk to others. This is done as part of the religious observance.

Within the belief-complex of Ladakhis the committing of offence in life time (especially taking away of a life) reflects adversely on after-death phase. In order to have smooth sailing after death the Ladakhis go in for the formation of Chhja or Chhacha. Pieces of unburnt bones are picked up from the remains of a cremated body. These are powdered and mixed with white clay paste. Out of this people make small figures, resembling Chorten, and keep them in big Chorten. The formation of such figures helps avoid difficult course.

Chan is one of the most notorious ghosts which the Ladakhis recognise. To escape from its bad effects the Bhotos raise Chandos. The latter help keep away Chan. Chandos is a collection of few stones coloured with red ochre. Formation of Chandos helps satisfy Chan. Lot of Chandos can be marked around the houses and along the paths. The formation of Chandos is an individual affair. In regard to Chandos description the Bhotos state that it never gets an abode and keeps on moving, riding on a horse back. In looks it resembles a skeleton dressed in red clothes. It induces fear followed by sickness.

A barren couple is considered unfortunate. The Ladakhis have devised various ways to beget a child. One of the beliefs is that one may be blessed with a child after the formation of Shog-pur. An impotent husband who shivers while visiting his wife cannot perform the sex act properly. He is given a Shog-pur which is prepared by Labha and Lama. The latter visit his house for the purpose. Shog-pur formation is done after the performance of relevant worship. A commonly accepted belief is that Shog-pur provides energy to the impotent man to do the sex act. Consequently it leads to conception and birth. Shog-pur is made out of bamboo strips or dry stems. It resembles a human figure. The figure is made to wear clothes too. Shog-pur is accommodated in Chotkang, alongwith other gods and goddesses, and is worshipped daily.

For Ladakhis the religion and rainfall are intimately connected. According to their belief the worship, termed Chharbeb or Chharbip, can help in getting rain. The worship further helps in getting more snow-fall and more water in the springs. When snow melts the Ladakhis get water for irrigation of fields. The observance of worship is essential in the event of water scarcity. The organisation of Chharbip is believed to appease Lhu, Magzur and Sadak. The latter supernaturals are said to be responsible for water supply. When happy they manage to provide more. On the other hand the drought conditions would prevail if they



are annoyed. As part of worship the Lamas throw Chandan Karmar, Gyacho Bua and Wambo Lagpa (substance that appease the supernaturals) into the springs.

Lho-stur or Skansol is another worship whose performance protects Ladakhis from disease. Every family must arrange it atleast once a year to satisfy the supernaturals including Chamshing, Lamo, Zigzet, Chhosgyal, Nezar, Shugdon, Namshe, Gonbo, Zalzi, Khitapa, Gonkar, Thinlese Gyapo etc. Skansol is performed by the Lamas. In case the worship is not performed the family members are likely to suffer from diseases. On the occasion of Skansol the villagers participate in food and drinks. The family god remains satisfied after the organisation of Skansol.

The Ladakhis firmly believe that the blessings of Lamas and Kushok are essential for a smooth living. And to get blessings the villagers approach the religious men and offer Khataks to them. The religious men reciprocate it by a Sundut, a red ribbon. The devotee ties this Sundut in the neck. One may come across so many people wearing Sundut. Chhonshung is another form of religious ribbon given by a superior religious man, Kushok or Dalai Lama. As per the belief of Ladakhis even the dagger and bullet would not affect a person wearing Chhonshung. A strong imposition on the man, wearing Chhonshung, is that he should not indulge in sexual intercourse. If the taboo is violated the Chhonshung would cease to have its force.

Boamskor is yet another worship which has religious as well as economic dimensions. It is believed that the performance of Boamskor helps protect the crops when they are about to ripe. The worship satisfies gods like Chhok Tum Gyamo and Shamur Ma Gyamo who are helpful in the matter. I participated in one of the Boamskor performances and found its account interesting. One fine morning the male members of village community reported at Gompa. A senior and a few junior Lamas took out some sacred literature, the pothis, from Gompa. These Pothis (religious books) were distributed to the people. Each man was given two to three Pothis which were carried on back duly wrapped in cloth. Two of the villagers carried the Photographs and portraits of Kushok Bakula and Chongappa. They fixed them on the front upper portion of their body. Later on they all came out of Gompa. The Lamas worshipped Gyamos by the chanting of hymns. All of them then loudly shouted in praise of gods and goddesses. The procession was headed by Dum Dumwala, followed by the Lamas and the villagers respectively. This procession was taken round the fields, people shouting in praise of gods and goddesses. Those who carried the portraits and photographs were interfered, after every little distance, by those villagers who did not join the procession. This was to greet them and to make offerings. The offerings, so collected, were finally given to the Lamas. The processionists made temporary halts in every section of the village. This was to take rest. The Pothis were kept at one place and the participants ate food and drank Gur Gur, arranged by the sectional heads,



It is done after the performance of a small scale worship. After this the participants again marched in the similar fashion covering all the sections of the village. Finally the procession ended in Gompa where all the Pothis were deposited. The villagers returned to their homes, being assured that their crops would not be damaged.

As in case of Mane and Chorten, the changing conditions have again adversely reacted to some superstitious beliefs of the people. Many informants have stated that since that start of blasting of hills, for the purpose of road or building construction, the Ladakhis have experienced acute scarcity of rains. It happened because the gods connected to rain got annoyed of blasting as it damaged their place of abode. In rather disgusted mood many of the informants stated that even the Lamas are helpless in the matter. The technological advancement coming hard on their belief system is not at all appreciated by the people.

### Gods and goddesses

The Ladakhis recognise and worship various gods and goddesses. The images of these are chiefly housed in Gompa. Some of these also find place in Chotkang where daily worship is the requisite. Among the important gods and goddesses are Chenresi, Chamba, Riksamganbo, Makzor Gaimo, Chham-Shing, Yul-La, Genbo, Chanlahete. Chenresi is recognised as the god of the dead. Its image is represented through a male figure in sitting posture. The image has four arms; two of these are folded and the rest slightly elevated. Normally the image is found decorated with metal and stone ornaments. Chamba is another image of god, more commonly found in Gompa. The figure is of a male but its countenance is like a female. Like Chenresi, Chamba too has a sitting posture and four arms but not folded. Out of the two upper arms one holds a rosary and the other flowers. One lower arm, out of the two, is open to the sky and the left one holds a water jar. Image of Chamba is decorated with various kinds of ornaments. The extent of decoration is said to depend upon the conomic position of Gompa. Riksamgonbo is regarded as the god of hills. He stays on the top of the hill only. The god is to be worshipped and kept appeased. Riksamgonbo's abode is symbolised through a small structure made on the top of the hill. The Ladakhis recognise this place and express regard for the same. This god helps meet a specific end in the interest of village community. He serves as buffer in between the people and the spirits living away from the village. When kept satisfied Riksamgonbo provides protection against outside spirits. He does not allow them to cross over the hills. The worship of Riksamgonbo is a collective affairs. Makzor Gaimo is a goddess, more popular in Spituk. She is believed to live in a stone and is different from hill god. The goddess, if ignored, makes a person blind and also causes cough and cold. Any other harm can also be caused. In Spituk the stone in which Gaimo is believed to live is lying in a water channel. It is a big stone and



is always shown respect by the people. The stone is never hit or broken. The villagers do not keep their foot on it. Clothes are not washed on this stone. These are all signs of respect for the goddess. When the prohibitions are ignored the goddess, it is believed, takes a furious and violent course and inflicts harm on the people. Gaimo is also believed to stay on a tree nearby. The tree commands respect as it has been assigned a sacred status. In addition the villagers have also constructed a Chorten near the site. New coatings of clay and colours are given to it on the occasion of Losar. Gaimo protects from sickness and adds to production and prosperity. The goddess is worshipped by arranging Shakspa Thuichol worship. The worship lasts for a day and the Lamas do it whenever required. More powerful and dangerous god is Chham-Shing. Respondents from Spituk have informed that this god stays on the same hill on which the Spituk Gompa stands. The exact location is the backyard of the main worship hall. The place is well protected and marked. A Lama offers daily worship, before sun-set, to this god. The worship is known as Sturbul. There are some taboos in respect of Chham-Shing. No Ladakhis should throw light on Chham-Shing after the sun-set. No one is allowed to throw water on this god. Anyone disregarding the prohibitions is bound to be harmed. Calamity may also strike in the form of epidemic or failure of crops.

Sangyas, Shaka Thubba or Gautam Buddha is the chief god of the Ladakhis. He, it is expressed, gave rise to Buddhism and so is considered its originator. Sangyas is all pure and truthful. Guru Rimpoche, Padmo Sambhava or Lobon Rimpoche is another god believed to be hot-tempered. The belief is that Sangyas gave him power to crush ghosts and evil spirits which were troubling him. He can prevail upon Lhu, Shinde, Magzur etc. It is stated that Rimpoche wrote Pothis suggesting means to remove the effects of ghosts and evil spirits. Dolma is a goddess believed to be helpful in various matters. She is chiefly responsible for increasing fertility of women. Dolma helps cause conception. Some informants even stated that Dolma promotes the cause of wealth, removing obstacles from a person's life. Chukshik Jal is another benevolent god. Zambala adds to richness and Rangeshal avoids calamity.

Yul-La is the village god and is held responsible for the entire village community and its economic survival. Lamas worship Yul-La every month. There is also an annual worship. A stony structure represents the image of this god and the same may be seen at more than one places in the village. The structure is usually found decorated with animal horns and dry bushes. Dry grass, wheat and barley plants form other articles of offering to Yul-La. Some even stressed that gold, silver and turquoises are kept beneath the image of Yul-La. An annual worship of Yul-La is organised by the villagers. Every morning, for about five to seven days, the Dum Dumwalas go to the place of Yul-La and play music for sometime. After this is over a man called Lardak, replaces the old offerings of Yul-La by the new ones. Leafs of Suppa tree are particularly



placed on the spot. The Goba, Members and other villagers visit the place. They all share Chang after the worship is over. If the offerings of Yul-La are not annually replaced he may get annoyed and harm the crops, animals and human beings. One of the functions of Yul-La is to forecast about the crops. A container, half filled with grain, is kept, inside the Yul-La structure and left there for a few days. If it is found full when checked next, there would be better crops. This is how the Ladakhi's determine it. Shamor Ma Gyamo is Yul-La of Sabu. This is one god whose worship is done through sacrifice. Offering of sacrifice is otherwise not approved by the Buddhist religion. The practice sound as survival of old Bon religion of Ladakh. The Ladakhis sacrifice a goat near the place of Shamor Ma Gyamo. Goba appoints a man for killing the goat. An important pre-requisite for the man who kills the goat is that he should be unmarried. Part of the blood is sprinkled on Yul-La. The rest of it is consumed by the participants. In some cases the man shivers prior to the killing of goat. The practice is locally termed as La Ba. The informants added that Zunu Tunlak, a popular god in Zanskar, is also worshipped through goat sacrifice. This sacrifice is arranged on the 8th day of the third Tibetan month. The Ladakhis assess these two gods as blood eaters and so are to be offered sacrifice. Sacrifice of goat is again done for the satisfaction of Rangeshal god and Paldan Lamo goddess.

Gonbo is a hill god and its appearance resembles a male figure. Some families keep the image of Gonbo in their Chhotkang. This is to please him. The clay figures, as images of Gonbo, are prepared in Leh. Gonbo's figure is to be annually worshipped. Sacred flames are lighted in front of Gonbo figure. The latter may be coloured and offered money. Kushok is stated to add colour, once a year, to Gonbo figure. If Gonbo is not cared for he may create conditions of calamity. He may reduce snowfall on the hills causing thereby scarcity of water for irrigation. This may lead to crop failure. Some of the sick persons are directed to worship Gonbo to seek relief. Chanlah is a god believed to be moving around. People remain alert of his presence. Ignoring him would invite trouble to the person concerned. Chanlah is more active at night and causes trouble during that time only. One is more prone to the attack of Chanlah while alone. The feeling of fear spontaneously develops making a person sick. For safety from Chanlah the villagers form Chandos. Tarchok formation is an added recommendation. It has been reported that the Ladakhis of Sakti village offer a goat sacrifice to Chanlah. The goat is arranged by rotation. It is an annual affair. It is reported that the Lamas, of late, persuaded Sakti people to give up the practice of goat sacrifice. The advice is yet to take a practical shape.

Lato is a Lha or god. Its image is made in every house and preserved in Chotkang alongwith some other god and goddesses. A Lato is made from Agrarbatti, leaf of Changma tree, cloth pieces and some precious metal. In addition to Chotkang Lato there is common Lato of the village.



It is located in the hills. Lato worship provides safety to men, women and animals in the house. They do not fall sick. Lato formation is believed to satisfy some of the other gods. He also protects one from evil spirit especially while in journey. The formation of a Lato is preferably done by the Kushok who is invited to perform the worship. He is offered money, Gur Gur, food etc. A Lato formation is to be renewed every year. And if it is not done one may invite harm. Lato is one of the oldest gods whose mention has been made by Featherstone (1926) too. He mentions that among Ladakhis another custom is of building cairns, called Hlato (Lato) or God's place, on the summit of mountain passes. These are crowned with the horns of wild sheep, ibex and other animals and in the centre is placed small bough or boughs of a tree on which is fastened a prayer flag, bearing inscribed thereon a holy text.

It may be mentioned that an integral part of the worship of gods and goddesses is the offering of Khatak, a holy scarf. One finds many of such scarfs hanging on the images of gods and goddesses, both in Chotkang as well as monastery. When the image of a supernatural is not within reach the Ladakhis have been seen throwing scarfs from a distance. To greet Kushok the most important object used is Khatak. The villagers offer him Khataks and he obliges them through his blessings. The Khataks are then collectively placed at one place considered sacred.

### **Ghost and spirits**

The Ladakhis believe in the existence of ghosts and spirits. Some of them are considered more mischievous and scaring. The death of a human being and animal is attributed to sickness sent by the ghost or the evil spirit. Most notorious of the malevolent supernaturals is known as Shinte. It is said to cause maximum harm to the human and animal population. Shinde or Shinte spirit originates from the death of a person who breathes last with lot of desires in mind. Such a person, while on death-bed, expresses that he has left many things undone and unresolved. The spirit of such a person becomes Shinte. Others explain that when a man indulges in bad deeds in his life time, his soul does not find any abode and roams here and there. In due course it assumes the form of Shinte. It is believed that Lhas provide protection to life while Dhuts are bent upon killing it. Shinde comes in Dhut category. As protection against Shinde the Lamas are requested to organise Dukar-Zok Gyur worship.

Lhu is another spirit most scaring to the Ladakhis. It is more for evil than good. Little anger to Lhu means big harm to the person and his family. A water source, where Lhu is believed to reside, is never damaged nor its water made dirty. Some of the informants have stated that the Ladakhis of Phae village do not domesticate dogs and cats (domestication of dogs is otherwise very popular among the Ladakhis). The fear is that they may sometimes go to the water source, where Lhu stays, and spoil the water. In that case the Lhu would become furious



and cause harm to the villagers. Lhu assumes the indifferent and the most harmful attitude when not bothered for. The cleaner the water in the water source, the happier would be the Lhu. The figure of Lhu is stated to resemble human being with snake on head. According to others it resembles fish and lizard. At times it is explained to have seven heads. Lhu is considered somewhat better than Shinde because it may, at times, be helpful. With its worship it may help increase the milk yield of an animal, crop production and water. The Lamas worship it on the spot to cause rain. When ignored the consequences may be reverse. Joint pains, muscle pull and boils are specially caused by Lhu. Lhuchas and Namkor Namthang worship are done to appease Lhu.

Lhande is a ghost. It has no specific abode and is found on the hills, under stones and along the river banks. Lhande is stated to resemble a tall black Lama. When a person gets confronted with Lhande, he falls sick. It is also believed that Lhande can take away the consciousness of a man while in sleep. Being half-asleep, the man follows Lhande. It is further stated that Lhande keeps the man under his control for four to five days. Lhande does attack animals. In order to satisfy Lhande, Chhewang or Chhadup worship is performed by the Lamas. That a man is under the influence of Lhande can be identified only by a qualified Lama.

The faith in evil spirits continues to be well intact. What Featherstone (1926) observed holds true. He mentions that people have strong faith in evil spirits and devils. Herein lies mostly the source of the power of the Lamas, who alone are able to exercise these demons, in terror of which the native spends his life. He wears charms, amulets, and relics of holy Lamas as protection against gods and devils, but as they turn out to be of little use, the priests are always being called upon to make good their deficiencies. The people are ready to believe anything the Lamas tell them and are always on the look out for omens, lucky days and unlucky days. These latter are discouraged by consulting professed astrologers, who give special divinations for the most important events in life, but in everyday life, the ordinary native generally judges for himself the omens and auguries. The natives are very superstitious. The Lamas are the real supporters of the devil worship which flourishes everywhere and provides one of their chief means of livelihood.

### Religious persons

To avoid misfortune, to get good luck and to keep gods and goddesses happy, the Ladakhis have certain means. Some of the religious men are taken help of for the purpose. Onpo is one of them. He is approached by a Ladakhi after a birth or death in family. He is also contacted in case of sickness or other difficulty. The Ladakhis, being deeply superstitious believe in the influence of stars over the life of a person and his affairs. When needed the Ladakhis consult Onpo, an astrologer as well



as astronomer. An Onpo is capable of forecasting future events. He does so in consultation of his holy literature. For any undersirable happening an Onpo would tell of the evil star and its influence. At times he would suggest for worship and installation of Buddhist flags having hymns written on them. A normal course of action suggested by Onpo involves formation of religious paintings known as Thanka, Skistak and Lhaskal. The latter is prepared in case of child birth alone. When made after death, a painting is known as Skistak. Such paintings mostly depict Buddha, or any of his disciples, alongwith other worship equipment. What shape a painting is to be given is decided by Onpo. This is done keeping in view relevant religious calculations. Thanka and Lhaskal are tied on cloth alone, and their size varies. Most of these, however, are about two feet long and one and a half feet broad. After the directive obtained from Onpo the needy approaches Spon who, in fact, makes the painting. Spon is a painter who may or may not be a religious person.

Thankas carry religious sanctity and are kept very carefully. These are not to be kept anywhere else but Chotkang. In this sacred part of the house the Thankas are made to hang against the walls. The paintings are either left open or are covered with plain cloth.

### Lama and Chomo

Lama is a religious man and Chomo a religious woman. They are both superior persons and enjoy a higher social and religious status. Such religious persons, in various categories, serve the villagers. They dedicate their life to religion and for the service of the community. The Lama devote to learning, preaching and worshipping. During my stay in Ladakhi villages I found that one or the other kind of worship formed almost a daily feature of one or the other family. The number of Lamas engaged varied according to the nature of worship. A common belief is that the Bhgtos opt to become Lamas and Chomos because they do not consider worldly life as good. They want to achieve religious knowledge and preach the same to others who are illiterate. It continues to be true that on an average every third family spares one person to join the fraternity of Lamas or Chomos. The table below gives a more clear picture in this regard.

**Table showing the number of Lamas and Chomos (Out of 300 families)**

Sl. No.	Category of religious persons	Total number	Percentage of the total population
1	Lama	45	2.49
2	Chomo	42	2.33
	Total	87	4.82



The table reveals that 300 families spared 87 persons to become Lamas and the Chomos. That means, out of a total population of 1806, eighty seven (4.82 %) joined the religious priesthood. These religious men and women lead a life of celibacy. After attaining a particular age, the Lamas shift to the monastery while the Chomos continue to live in their respective houses. Lama and Chomo can distinctly be identified in the Ladakhi society because of the particular style they live in. A Lama wears a saffron-coloured robe, resembling a dressing gown. This is girdled with a cloth band. On the upper part of body, and under the gown is worn a tight jacket of yellow or red colour, depending on the sect to which one belongs. One belonging to Red-sect would wear jacket and cap of the red colour. A religious man of Yellow sect wears yellow coloured jacket and cap. A Chomo also wears similar dress but the design of her cap differs. It is conical in shape, not very pointed at the upper tip. The Lama and the Chomo shave off their heads and never allow their hair to grow long. The other Ladakhis wear their hair long. Even the men grow it long to protect the head from cold. With long hair and cap, the Ladakhis face the extreme winter. The Lamas live in Gompa campus and spend their time in religious learning and its practical display. Till the age of about eight the boy, to be made Lama, stays in the parental home. Later on he is admitted in the monastery and given a new name. Then he severs some of his connections with his family of orientation and becomes more integral part of Gompa. Except a few the Chomos now stay in their respective houses and lead the life of celibacy. The religious knowledge of a Lama is definitely far more than a Chomo. At the same time the Chomos can be found sharing the household and other activities. The Lamas, however, are never asked to do that. They are exclusively meant for religious performance. The Chomos do household work, look after fields and also tend cattle. They attend to the call of Gompa people and are employed for various works in Gompa. They may look after Gompa crops and are also used for cleaning purpose. When the villagers work for Gompa agriculture fields the Chomos are asked to manage food for them. They do it from Gompa funds. In spite of all this a Chomo's position is definitely considered superior to other women, though the superiority is not all the time exhibited.

It has been reported that rule of primogeniture was responsible for sparing male children to join priest-hood. Likewise the system of polyandry spared girls for spinsterhood. Such formations also got impetus from the feeling of leading a religious life. It is expressed that because of a high proportion of females, coupled with polyandry, there have been some surplus females who could not marry. If they could not be diverted to religious life, the chances of immoral traffic would have increased. In this background the Chomo formation was further encouraged. Simultaneously it was almost obligatory on family to spare a girl for Chomohood. People have further reported that the children who frequently fall



sick are dedicated to Gompa. When the new-borns of a couple die, one after another, they decide to dedicate one child to Gompa. The belief is that so doing will enhance survival chance. Also, to maintain family tradition a person is spared to join priestly class. It may be reported that the number of Lamas as well as the Chomos is towards decline because of the changing pattern of inheritance and the declining polyandry. With number the change has also occurred in their professional orientation. The Chomos are now less religion-oriented because they stay in their family house. The Lamas who used to be previously sent to Lhasa for training have now stopped going. The check on this religious training has been imposed by the latter political developments. Under the new circumstances Lhasa is no longer the spiritual fountain head for the Ladakhi Lamas.

Among the Lamas exists a social hierarchy. The highest placed are the Kushoks, most of whom are believed to be reincarnate. The person who can be accorded the highest honour and respect in Ladakhi society is the Kushok. The importance of his visit to any village is more than anybody else. He is welcomed by all men, women and children. Offerings of various kind are made to him. A Kushok runs the Gompa administration and his word is a law. Like a monarch he can order dismissal as well as appointment of any person in monastery. A Kushok is never challenged by any person. Three categories of Lamas are reported. One is Chung-Zung, Chung, Bande or Ge-Yen. He is a novice to Lamaism. A boy dedicated to religion is given a new name. His head is shaved to make him Chung-Zung. He can initially stay in his family, or may join the Gompa. For two to three years, or even more, his behaviour is observed to assess his caliber for Lamaship. He has to observe the main principles, namely to abstain from Chang, offence, theft, sex indulgence etc. If one maintains the restrictions for five to seven years he is made a Gheesul, the next higher stage in Lamahood. Kushok and Khonbo are empowered to declare a man Gheesul. A Lama becomes Gheesul after attaining the age of about fifteen years. At this stage he has to strictly observe thirty six principles meant for Lama. He also starts taking lessons in Buddhist philosophy. In the next higher stage he becomes Gallong. This is around the age of twentyfive. A Gallong has still more impositions and observes 253 conditions. He is believed to be a learned Lama. The position of Gallong is attained only after undergoing sufficient training in religious philosophy. Next higher stage is of Sang-Nak. The man devotes largely to meditation. Like the Lamas the hierarchical order for Chomos is also defined. A beginner Chomo is known as Geyen Ma. On her promotion she becomes Gheesul Ma, and finally Gallong Ma. The latter is explained to be the highest category in the ranking of Chomos. I met quite a few Chomos and found them, irrespective of their rank, lacking in religious knowledge. For most of my queries they stated their inability to explain. How far they are connected with religion can be shown by the case history of Lobzang

Chhoral, a Chomo from Spituk. She became Chomo at the age of eight. Chhoral has neither stayed in any Gompa nor knows reading and writing. She has not been formally taught the philosophy of Buddhism or Lamaism. Of course she wears the dress meant for a Chomo. Chhoral is, now, the head of female labour force, engaged as civilian labourers. She can understand and speak bit of Hindi. Whenever free she devotes some time to agriculture works. In addition she responds to Gompa's call whenever her services are asked for.

Apart from stratification in terms of religious achievements there are two other broad division of Lamas. One of these consists of those who chiefly devote to meditation and worship. They are not involved in any activity related to worldly affairs. Another category is of those Lamas who cater to the temporal needs of the community. The men, in latter category, also manage to look after Gompa land, cattle, trade etc. They collect funds for Gompa and maintain the accounts. The patterns of two divisions are as under :

#### Spiritual section

- |    |            |   |                                  |
|----|------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. | Kushok     | — | An incarnation                   |
| 2. | Lobon      | — | An abbot                         |
| 3. | Chos-Timpa | — | Who controls religious meetings  |
| 4. | Chhomson   | — | Who directs the religious dances |

#### Temporal section

- |    |           |   |              |
|----|-----------|---|--------------|
| 1. | Chhag-jot | — | Treasurer    |
| 2. | Nyerchhen | — | Steward      |
| 3. | Hyerpa    | — | Storekeeper  |
| 4. | Phi-Nyer  | — | Farm Steward |

Among Lamas the level of attainment differs. The fact has been established during the course of fieldwork. More number of Lamas (and almost all Chomos) are not rationally conversant even with the practices they are engaged in. When they perform a worship, and if asked about its functional interpretation, they are unable to explain. They take things for granted and do not bother about the intricacies of religious performance. Many a times I observed Lamas dozing during the course of worship. When they suddenly wake up they again start murmuring something. But there are other Lamas who are undoubtedly intelligent. And whatever they do they thoroughly understand. They have a wider understanding of things and explain well the rituals, ceremonies and worship performed by them. Amchi or Lharje, the medicine-man of the Ladakhis, is not necessarily a religious man. He need not be in Lama fraternity. But he certainly depends upon the sacred Pothis while treating the sick. To attain Amchiship, one has to do a vast reading of literature under the guidance and training of a trained Amchi. If



need be he can seek help of Kushok and other senior Lamas for clarification. For cure an Amchi is in link with the religious men, the Lamas, Kushok, Labha, Chanspa etc. From the sacred books, dealing with medicines, the details are gathered for preparing medicines from roots and herbs. When the worship is used as a means of curing, the Amchi himself sits in the Chotkang of the patient's family and performs it. Such a worship of gods and goddesses is believed to cure the patient. In such an instance Amchi acts as a religious man. Because of this background, and for his expertise as a curer, an Amchi is given higher status in society. He is recognised as a professional leader. His appeal to the gods and goddesses or his prevailing upon certain evil spirits and ghosts is a sufficient support to an Amchi being a religious man. Worship, in fact, is suggested or done by the Amchi to ward off the influence of evil spirits. Warding off such influence helps cure the disease. Apart from herbal medicines and worship, the other ways of treatment, practised by an Amchi, include the induction of red-hot iron into the body of patient, and a bath in mineral water of the springs. In latter case the Amchi accompanies the patient to the spring and directs him for the purpose.

Phunchok Namgyal is the Amchi of Spituk. He commands great respect. Aged about 42, Phunchok stays permanently in the village. He has read upto 6th standard and is employed as Postman in Post and Telegraph Department. Phunchok's family is polyandrous with six children. His eldest son, read upto 5th standard, has already started learning Amchi's profession. Phunchok diagnoses the sickness by feeling the pulse, and treats by inserting a red-hot iron rod in some part of the body. Some medicines, prepared out of plants, herbs and roots are also given. His charges are nominal, not exceeding two rupees, food and Gur Gur. He also performs worship in the patient's house. Phunchok has not inherited this position from his father. But his son is learning the profession and has already decided to take it up.

### Labha

Labha, another religious man, is not as popular as a Lama or Amchi is. Even the number of Labhas is comparatively less. Generally there is one Labha for two to three villages. In bigger villages there may be one each. The position of a Labha is considered important and far above the commoners though he is not as frequently consulted as a Lama or a Lharje. A Labha is believed to be possessed by a deity and with her help only he cures the ailments. There are two main elements of Labha's technology. Firstly, a Labha tries to cure by himself. Secondly, he suggests to organise a worship or contact an Amchi. Labha himself does not perform any worship. The Ladakhis are of the opinion that a weak-hearted man becomes Labha because he easily gets possessed by the deity. When one gets possessed of a deity he tries to learn relevant techniques from some trained Labha. The Labha has the capability of removing

poison from the body of a person. He can take out iron needle from animal stomach. Labha does not cause harm to anyone and is always useful. The deity, possessing Labha, cannot be used for causing harm.

### Chanspa

A Chanspa is mostly a Lama who lives in interior hills and devotes to meditation. It is through meditation that he attains a high spiritual knowledge and understanding. The spiritual attainment of a Chanspa is so strong that he can even foretell whether a sick person would survive or not. Those suffering from the evil influence of spirits are taken to Chanspa. Or, somebody contacts Chanspa on behalf of the sufferer. Generally the Chanspa, after making his calculations, suggests for worship. More popular of these is Lhuchas. The worship is performed in Chotkang belonging to person concerned. Organisation of Shilok worship is also suggested. The latter is performed by Lobon to ward off the effects of ghosts and evil spirits.

The course of meditation for becoming Chanspa is a tough one. A man has to mediate for three years, three months and seven days. The period is spent in small isolated hut. The man also devotes to reading. Only a strong-willed Lama opts for this course in life. In addition to help society, a man decides to become Chanspa for self purification. Some admitted that a Chanspa is helpful in begetting children.

### Gompa—a religious organization

A Gompa organisation has two major dimensions; one religious and the other civic. Those who perform the latter functions are also the Lamas. That way the number of Lamas is large. But only a few of them are given formal positions. The incumbents, by and large, against such positions keep on changing, depending more on the Kushok's will. But the achieved positions, through religious attainment, do not involve any change of incumbent. The spiritual and temporal positions, in order of sequence described by the informants are as follows :—

1. Kushok
2. Khonbo or Gonbo
3. Chhag or Chhang-jot
4. Lobon
5. Nirpa
6. Gey-kos
7. Umjey
8. Uchung
9. Chhampon
10. Chhamjog
11. Chhabrel
12. Chama
13. Komniar



Kushok is always a reincarnation. He appoints Lamas from position No. 2 to No. 10. The rest three are appointed by Khonbo.

1. Kushok is the overall head and incharge of Gompa. A Kushok, after death, gets rebirths. The place and family in which a Kushok is reborn are searched by Gompa management with the help of Dalai Lama. A Kushok is the spiritual as well as the administrative head of monastery. He enjoys power of dismissal and appointment of any Lama. A good deal of personal interest is taken by Kushok in appointing Khonbo, Chhang-jot and Lobon. For others he may not take more of pains.

2. Khonbo or Head Lama is next in position to Kushok. In the absence of Kushok he officiates for most of the functions. He behaves as additional Kushok and is permitted to preach and conduct other activities meant for Kushok. On behalf of Kushok he conducts examinations for Lamas to elevate them to higher positions. Khonbo can go to perform worship in the families. Formation of Lamas and Chomos is initiated by him. He is vested with power to punish a Lama. As part of punishment he can outrightly expell a Lama or give him some hard work. A Khonbo however is all submissive to Kushok. In addition a Khonbo is to see that the Gompa laws are properly respected by the Lamas.

3. Chhang-jot is the custodian of land and other property of Gompa. He is its manager and treasurer. He sees that the agriculture on Gompa land is done properly. Daily ration for Gompa men is issued by him as the store is in his charge. He is also in possession of Gompa cash. His term of office is for four years. Before handing over he submits the accounts to Kushok who appoints someone else in his place. A simple, truthful, hardworking and honest man is selected for the purpose.

4. Lobon, unlike Chhang-jot, is again a religious man of Gompa. It may be stated that smaller Gompas, under the control of major one, are headed by Lobons. A Kushok does not directly head them. For instance Shankar, Sabu and Stock Gompas (subsidiary of Spituk Gompa) are headed by one Lobon each. For all purposes they regard Spituk Kushok as their fountain head. The Kushok of main Gompa commands his authority over the rest of Gompas. A very special job of the Lobon is to organise worship. He is its organiser and fixes time, date, place etc. Other arrangements, in this regard, are also made by him. Another part of his job is to keep an eye on the character and activities of the Lamas.

5. Nirpa is an assistant to Chhang-jot and helps in all kinds of jobs assigned to him. But in subsidiary Gompas he acts as independent Chhang-jot and performs all his functions, almost parallel to those of the chief monastery. In smaller Gompas a Nirpa is the manager of land and property. But in chief monastery he is simply an assistant manager; the manager being the Chhang-jot himself.

6. Gey-kos is an assistant to the chief worship organiser, the Lobon. The latter, being more devoted to religious life, assigns certain jobs to the former. During the course of worship it is the job of Gey-kos to see that the Gur Gur and food are regularly and timely served. Those who serve the



meals are guided by him. It is his responsibility to make sitting arrangements at the time of worship. In this regard he waits for the direction of Lobon. Under his supervision it is seen that all the participants in worship seriously read the sacred literature and do not indulge in talking and gossip. Permission to leave the the worship is to be taken from him. But when a Lama requires long leave he has to approach Kushok to get it sanctioned.

7. Umjey's position is again one of importance, especially in the context of religion. As a matter of fact it is his privilege to initiate the performance of worship. That is one reason why this position is given to a senior and intelligent Lama. While initiating a worship Umjey shouts Ha-Ha-Ha, and this is followed by loud gong-music. In addition to this job an Umjey has also been assigned the task of conducting examination for junior Lamas. He is deputed to attend religious meetings outside Gompa.

8. Uchung is an assistant to Umjey and officiates for all duties in his absence. When an Umjey falls sick his responsibilities are taken even by Uchung. Even when Umjey is involved in other jobs he may ask Uchung to share some of his functions. The latter are not related to personal life but as defined in the duty chart.

9. Chhampon has a big role to play in Gompa. He is the director and organizer of religious dramas and dances, specially performed on the occasion of annual fair of Gompa. He supervises all rehearsals which the Lamas have almost all the year round. All dresses, steps, movements and dramatic sequence are prescribed by Chhampon. This man is well experienced to manage for the elaborate dramatic performances. He guides for the rhythmic movements of hands and feet of the participant Lamas. These dramatic performances help transmit the cultural heritage of Ladakhis. The transmitted traits are internalized by the observers who come from far off places to see the dances and dramas.

10. Chhamjog is an assistant to Chhampon and helps him in all activities. As the work load of Chhampon is more he needs an active assistant to help him. A Chhamjog is also well conversant with the jobs of Chhampon. It may be mentioned that the assistants, in all cases except that of Kushok, are normally promoted to the superior positions after the retirement of their seniors. As assistants they develop expertise in the jobs of senior men. On the occasion of annual fair of Gompa the Chhampon allots part of his job to Chhamjog.

11. Chhabrel's role is an important one, especially at the time of annual or other worship wherein the villagers participate. On the occasion of bigger worship, Chhabrel directs the villagers in terms of their way, order and place. He gives the same directions in the temple room too. On the occasion of annual worship a Chhabrel directs the younger Lamas for making arrangement for Gur Gur.

12. Chama is the kitchen supervisor and attends to relevant duties



daily as well as on special occasions. He looks after cleanliness, eatables, utensils, fuel etc. Management of kitchen is under his charge and he is authorised to allot the duties in any way he feels like. A Chama personally supervises food and Gur Gur preparation. Any problem regarding kitchen is brought to his notice.

13. Komniar is a Lama responsible for cleanliness of Gompa. When Gompa and its surroundings give a dirty look, the Kushok and Lamas point to Komniar. To keep the rooms and temple clean he takes help of junior Lamas, Chomos and the villagers. The Lamas have standing instruction to keep their rooms clean. The major part of cleanliness involves dusting of worship equipment, statues and other figures of gods and goddesses, paintings, tables and library books. This job is given to a man of confidence because some of these things are rare possessions and precious. In case they are lost from Gompa their replacement would be difficult.

The changing conditions around have hardly made any impact on Gompa and its religious organisation. This holds true for structure as well as role parameters. The core of religious formation continues to be strong. In comparison to other aspects of life the religion, among Ladakhis, is still a stronghold.

## Culture Change—A Review

This account of culture change is in continuation of what has, so far, been explained as continuity and change. The existing socio-cultural milieu of the Ladakhis, as analysed in earlier chapters, does involve synchronic as well as diachronic explanations. And in the social structure parameters one can easily spot out instance of *status quo* and dynamics. Since some of the cultural events and elements cannot easily be discussed in isolation of change and continuity dimensions, they had to be dealt simultaneously. Such a treatment does facilitate the reader to compare the situation of fixity, persistence and change.

However, to further highlight the prominent aspect of change and continuity, and to inculcate more precision this chapter has been separated. An account of traditional cultural traits and those lately incorporated as new precisely form the major contents of this exercise. An added dimension of these explanations lies in the revelations of the nature of attitude to the old as well as the new. Analysis of this kind helped to hint at future trends and projections of change. One can have glimpse of it in the earlier interpretations too. The empiricism made in the paragraphs that follow provides statistical support to some of the mechanical arguments. The degree and extent of culture change cover some of the more prominent aspects including social stratification, family, lineage, Phasphun, rites-de-passage, economic organisation, religious structure and socio-political organisation.

It may be recalled that the Ladakhis stratification and inequality are social, ritual, power and class based. The nature of stratification has already been discussed in the relevant chapter. The account of change is as under.

**Table showing the change in varions forms of Ladakhi hierarchy**

Sl. No.	Nature of stratification	No. of informants who feel it is changed	Percentage
1	Social	24	8.00
2	Ritual	Nil	—
3	Power	162	54.00
4	Class	6	2.00



The table reveals of a significant change in power hierarchy. All the 54.00 % informants who admitted change have stated that the positions on Kalhon and Goba are no longer as powerful as they used to be in the past. The authority and power which Kalhons enjoyed before India attained independence are no longer the privilege. But in case of Goba the change is relatively of a mild order. In certain respects he continues to have an upper hand and more say. Only eight percent of the Ladakhis feel that the positions of Mon and Gara have been elevated. However, it may be stated that in day to day life and interaction the positive change in the position of Mon and Gara could not be marked. Irrespective of their ethnic group affiliations the persons associated with carpentry are said to be belonging to superior class. This could categorically be supported by three informants. The rest three, out of six who spoke for change in class pattern, are of the opinion that the Kalhon class is now less differentiated. But at the level of empirical reality the bulk of population is still for differentiation.

As already stated the social groupings among Ladakhis have bearing on kinship and other considerations. The grouping is not very elaborate. Nang-Chang and Gyut are purely kinship-specific. Phasphun, however, is not necessarily a kinship group. Its function is also different from that of Nang-Chang and Gyut. Change in respect of social grouping can be discussed as under.

**Table showing the change in respect of social groupings of the Ladakhis**

Sl. No.	Social groups	Those who admitted change	Percentge
1	Phasphun	108	36.00
2	Gyut	90	30.00
3	Nang-Chang	117	39.00

It may be made clear that only those, out of 300 informants, who admitted change in the social groups find mention in the table. That some change has taken place in the Phasphun group is supported by 108 respondents. The rest agreed that the group continues to be in the traditional form. The change mainly concerned the size of the group. Out of 108 informants, 69 (63.89 %) have expressed that the size of Phasphun has increased in later years. That means the families per Phasphun group are now more. On the other hand, 39 (36.11 %) Ladakhis expressed for contraction of Phasphun structure. No change was, however, reported in terms of the roles and activities of Phasphun group.

Likewise the change explained in the context of Gyut is again structural and not organisational. Only 90 informants admitted change in case of this kinship-based group. Out of 90, the change in terms of

increased size and number of Gyuts was supported by 84 (93.33%). The trend might have got impetus from the sizeable increase in Ladakhi population. But in contrast, 6 informants have stated it the other way round. According to them, the Gyut size is contracting.

More of the respondents (117) agreed that Nang-Chang grouping has undergone change. Out of these, 78 (66.66%) stated that this social group has fast assumed the nuclear form. They spoke for the trend that extended family pattern is heading towards nuclear one. And this reflected on the average family size too. But at the same time, 39 (33.34%) respondents have stated that the family size has increased. It may be reported that there is now, predominance of nuclear families, followed by extended ones. The contradicting opinions, given by the informants, may have their root in specific situations created by changed, changing and the continuing conditions. The norms of behaviour in Nang-Chang continue to remain, by and large, unchanged. The functional importance of such groups in the social structure purview maintains originality.

The rites, rituals and ceremonies connected to birth, marriage and death occupy an important place in Ladakhi social structure. Others apart the social, economic and religious implications of the same form an integral part of discussion on change. The response in terms of change is as under.

**Table explaining change in relation to rites-de-passage**

Sl. No.	Rites-de-passage	Those who reported change	Percentage
1	Birth	81	27.00
2	Marriage	204	68.00
3	Death	48	16.00

More, out of 300 respondents, have admitted change in respect of the institution of marriage. The least, that is 16.00 %, explained change in the context of death rites and ceremonies. Since the ceremonial complex in the event of death involves emotions and sentiments the reflection of change is poor. These elements compel people confine to the frame of traditionality. On the other hand the instance of change is more in the sphere of marriage which provides more flexibility as per the Ladakhi norms.

Out of 81 who explained change in connection with the rites, customs and ceremonies related to birth, seven admitted of change in ceremonial observances. The latter are now observed with less rigidity. Some of the areas are even ignored. On the other hand the rest, that is 74, said it the other way. According to them the ceremonial performances, connected to birth, are now more elaborately observed proving more expensive to the Ladakhis. The price-rise is another factor for increase in expenses.



Out of 204 who responded for change in marriage, 33 stated that the Phorsak no longer exists. Keeping Phorsak used to be a common practice in the past. Explaining change the rest of the informants said that the marriage expenditure is now more than what it used to be before. They also spoke of the rising frequency of love marriages. The economic aspect of change was further highlighted in case of death rituals and ceremonies whose performance now involves more expenditure. The Bulba, in the event of a death, now fetches more amount, and hence more income to Lamas and the monastery. From the account of change, given above, one can infer that the traditional rites, customs and ceremonies, connected to birth, marriage and death, continue to exist (except Phorsak). There is no replacement anywhere. That means the attitude of Ladakhis to such a ceremonial complex is maintained as before. The change is in the economics involved and in the degree of observance.

In spite of new economic opportunities the Ladakhis continue to chiefly depend upon agriculture and animal husbandry. Other subsidiary occupations are also followed. Some innovations in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry do form part of change. More of these are additions rather than replacement. Use of improved seeds, implements, chemical fertilizers, insecticides and technical know-how is a later development. The detailed stock of such innovations is given below.

**Table giving an account of agricultural innovations**

Sl. No.	New or improved input or practice	No. of respondents who adopted	Percentage
1	Seed	54	18.00
2	Fertilizer	168	56.00
3	Implements	6	2.00
4	Insecticide	21	7.00
5	Technical know-how	21	7.00

It is revealed that in general (except in case of fertilizer) the adoption of agricultural innovations is slow. The background has already been explained in the relevant chapter on economic structure. It may be mentioned that no improved input or practice has been adopted in Kuyul. Adoption is more prominent in Spituk and Thiksay. Though nearer to Leh, the agriculture innovations are not that popular in Sabu. Reason being its location at higher elevation where irrigation facility is inadequate.

Only eighteen percent of the Ladakhis use improved seeds, mostly of wheat and vegetables. The latter are grown in villages around Leh. The most popular of the improved agriculture practices is the chemical fertilizer which 56.00 % of the farmers use. The next, in popularity, are the insecticides and the technical know-how. The least (2.00 %) adopted

are the improved implements. With most of the Ladakhis the old practices are still popular, partly because many of these get religious support. The ecological conditions and lack of awareness are also responsible for continuity of the old.

The condition is no better in case of livestock rearing. How slow the Ladakhis are in the adoption of improved practices of animal husbandry is shown in the table below.

**Table showing the adoption of improved animal husbandry**

Sl. No.	Improved practice	No. of persons adopted	Percentage
1	Animals of improved breed	18	6.00
2	Vaccination	3	1.00
3	Artificial insemination	Nil	—

Only 6.00 % of the Ladakhis have animals of improved breed. These include Zo, Zomo and the poultry birds. It has been reported that the Zo and Zomo of improved breed are readily accepted. But the poultry birds, because of their high mortality in winter months, are not welcomed. Of course when they are available free of cost, people accept them. Vaccination of animals could be done only in 1.00 percent cases. The rest bank upon the traditional ways of treatment and cure. Most of the Ladakhis have not even heard of the improved animals and practices. What is primarily required is the development of awareness.

As already explained the other important elements of Ladakhi economic life include trade, division of labour, exploitation and income. Surplus and property aspects are not elaborately accounted for. Because of their being on the ancient trade route, many Bhotos from Ladakh were, directly or indirectly, involved in trade in the past. Then the magnitude of exploitation was higher. What change has taken place in these constituents of Ladakhi economic system is revealed by the following table.

**Table showing the change in various elements of economic system**

Sl. No.	Elements of economic system	No. of respondents who admit change	Percentage
1	Trade	24	8.00
2	Income	219	73.00
3	Division of labour	60	20.00
4	Surplus	15	5.00
5	Property	3	1.00
6	Exploitation	69	23.00



It is evident that more change is reported in the context of income. Out of 300 informants, 219 (73.00 %) have admitted that the change in income has taken place. All agreed that their income is now higher than what it used to be in the past. Nearly 8.00 per cent of the Ladakhis reported that they are no longer involved in trade with Tibet. As the Tibet borders are now sealed the Ladakhis indulge in internal transportation of goods. For this purpose they make use of zo, mule, horse, goat and sheep. Since the rise of new economic opportunities, some readjustment in division of labour has been made. Nearly sixty informants expressed that their women now work more in the fields as the men have joined services. Looking to the nature of response in case of income the replies in respect of surplus and property do not seem to be matching. Only 5.00 percent admitted that their surplus is now more than ever before. Three own shops and more property than before. Nearly 23.00 % of the Ladakhis expressed that the exploitation is now less. People are free from forced labour and Res impositions.

In the context of socio-political life and social control the change account is not of any high magnitude. Some additions, as new patterns, have, however been made. This emerged in the process of politicization of Ladakhis, especially after their developing awareness of National Congress. The creation of a category of Members, and the associated norms, is said to be the direct result of such development. The following table gives an account of the changes in various elements of socio-political control.

**Table showing the change in various elements of socio-political control**

Sl. No.	Element	No. of respondents who admitted change	Percentage
1	Pattern	75	25.00
2	Norm	48	16.00
3	Reward	—	—
4	Punishment	48	16.00

Change in pattern and norm arenas could be reported by 25.00 % and 16.00 % of the Ladakhis respectively. It chiefly pertains to the origin of Members who continue to be the integral part of village council. Depending on the population of village the number of Members varies. Alongwith the creation of position of Member came into effect new functions and roles. The inclusion of Members in village council gave it a more democratic form. Before that the Goba alone prevailed over others. The earlier severity of punishment declined as per 16.00 % of the informants. The jolt came not because of the emergence of Members but because of changing conditions and new system of administration at official level.

With the rise of new trends, structural and positional, the attitude and reaction of the Ladakhis to old agencies of socio-political control took a new turn. When a question was posed as to whom do they approach for seeking justice and decision in the event of a conflict, the response showed a good deal of variation. It ranged from traditional to the newly emerged agencies. The nature of such response is as follows.

**Table showing the agencies contracted for seeking decisions**

Sl. No.	Agency contracted	No. of respondents (out of 300)	Percentage
1	Goba alone	12	4.00
2	Member alone	18	6.00
3	Goba as well as Member	219	73.00
4	Any other (Police, Kotwal, Tehsildar, A and B Congress)	27	9.00

It may be stated that out of 300 respondents only 276 answered the question. The rest do not approach anyone as they have never been involved in any conflict. Majority, that is 73.00%, of the Ladakhis approach Goba as well as the Member for seeking justice. Only 4.00% report to Goba alone, and 6.00% exclusively bank upon Members. Some 9.00% of the Ladakhis depend on Police, Kotwal, Tehsildar and Congress 'A' and 'B'. Since the latter agencies are not available at village level, not many people approach them. Secondly they are to be contacted only in serious cases alone. The Goba and the Members take help of monastic institutions as and when necessary. The dependence on traditional agencies is still of a very high order.

The dominance of religion on Ladakhi life and culture stands almost uninterrupted. Ladakhis dependence on religion is too much. While discussing change in the context of religious elements it was reported that most of it has remained intact. Some important religious attributes, explored in this context, included spirits, gods, goddesses, beliefs, practices and worship. More specifically the position is as under.

**Table showing the change in respect of religious contents**

Sl. No.	Religious contents	No. of respondents who feel change	Percentage
1	Lhu	6	2.00
2	Shinde	6	2.00
3	Magzur	6	2.00

*Contd.*



Sl. No.	Religious contents	No. of respondents who feel change	Percentage
4	Gyamo	6	2.00
5	Lharchang	6	2.00
6	Other beliefs	12	4.00
7	Practices	18	6.00
8	Worship	6	2.00

The table supports that maximum (6.00 %) change has occurred in case of religious practices. People have not done away with the practices but the incidence of their observance has declined. Nearly 60.00 % of these 18 respondents further stated that they do not construct any Mane and Chhorten. They may, however, improve upon the old ones. In the religious belief-system, 4.00 % Ladakhis have reported for change. However, this change is contradictory in the sense that 75.00 % of the total 12 respondents accord less recognition to the beliefs, whereas the rest, 25.00 %, respect them more. The change in case of worship, spirits, gods and goddesses is of the order of 2.00 % in each case. Those who admitted change in the sphere of worship have expressed that its frequency and form of observance have suffered set-back. Two responses given in relation to gods, goddesses and spirits are of controversial nature. Half of the informants have strengthened their belief in them. But in case of other half the same has dwindled. The increase or decrease of faith has correspondingly reflected on the performance of connected rituals and ceremonies.

More of the Ladakhis consider disease and sickness as caused by the supernaturals. The treatment too is sought from the religious persons like Kushok Lama, Chanspa etc. The explanation for cause and cure of diseases is deeply rooted in religion and its various manifestations. But lately the Ladakhis have started taking advantage of new opportunities concerning health and sickness, thereby showing change in their attitude. An elaborate account of the same is given below.

**Table showing as to whom the Ladakhis contact for treatment**

Sl. No.	Agency contacted	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Trained doctor alone	9	3.00
2	Traditional curers alone	114	38.00
3	Both of the above	117	59.00

Only 3.00 % of the Ladakhis get treatment from trained doctor alone. On the other hand, 38.00 % continue to exclusively depend on the traditional curers including Lama, Kushok, Chanspa, Amchi etc. There are still others (59.00 %) who get treated by the traditional curers as well as the trained doctors. But in almost all these cases the first to be approached is the traditional curer. It is only in the secondary stage that the trained doctor is contacted. This explains of the continuity of their faith on traditional agencies. As more of the practices, followed by the latter, are religion-based and as religion continues to have hold on the life and culture of the Ladakhis, the traditional ways of curing are given weightage.

Under the existing situation the Ladakhi life and culture present fixity, persistence and change. Traditional continuity overpowers the change parameters. Instances of modern trends are rarely met with. The process of transition is extremely slow, more so in the social and spiritual complex. Comparatively transformed are a few areas of material way of life. The change-inhibiting factors, built in the traditional social structure, are going strong. The outside stimulants have yet to shake them in the interest of change. The pro-change infrastructure is inadequate looking to the nature and background of Ladakhi society. Poor instance of culture change is attributed to certain built-in provisions of social-cultural milieu and to the eco-system. A large part of network of cultural elements is an outcome of adjustment with the ecological conditions. And it is this network which claims for more intactness. Spheres beyond signify acculturative influence, whatever be its order and quality. Ladakhi society is still bogged down in hard traditions—rational or irrational. To bring it up in terms of planned development and change one has to take stock of interconnected manifestations of religion, ecology and society. The internal order as well as the external agencies need to be geared up to show new directions. Since the region and society suffer from remoteness and natural hazards the provision for extra resource, zeal and dedication is to be made to help our frontier men and women.



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